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TAKERU MANGA

1

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Sumita
Blond

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Matt Hawkins - president and chief operating officer
Rob Levin - vice president - editorial
Filip Sablik - vice president - marketing & sales
Chaz Riggs - graphic design
Phil Smith - managing editor

ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO:

WITCHBLADE MANGA
Top Cow Productions, Inc.
[illegible] Santa Monica Blvd., #100
[illegible] eles, CA 90025
[illegible] fanmail@topcowent.com

FOR Image COMICS Erik Larsen publisher

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WRITER - YASUKO KOBAYASHI
ARTIST - KAZASA SUMITA
COLORIST - BLOND
LETTERS - TROY PETERI
DESIGN - CHAZ RIGGS

COVER A - KAZASA SUMITA
COVER B - CHRISTIAN GOSSETT AND STEVE FIRCHOW
COVER C - MAKOTO UNO

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY AKITA SHOTEN AS WITCHBLADE TAKERU.

WITCHBLADE™

TAKERU MANGA

Dear Fans,

All of us here at Top Cow take enormous pride in presenting to you Witchblade: Manga! This project is part of a larger partnership with the fine people at Studio GONZO, a Japanese animation studio many of you may be familiar with, and a first of its kind. Witchblade: Manga was written by Yasuko Kobayashi, the lead story writer on the Witchblade Anime, and illustrated masterfully by Kazasa Sumita. Inside you'll meet Takeru, the latest bearer of the mystical Witchblade!

You may be asking why this authentic manga is in color and a traditional American comic format. Our goal was to present Witchblade: Manga in a way that allowed as many of our fans to enjoy the story as possible. We worked with Studio GONZO, the original Japanese publisher Akita Shoten, and original artist Sumita to make that happen. With the blessing of everyone involved, we brought in a master colorist, flipped the art so it read left-to-right and at a standard American comic size. Sumita was kind enough to say, "I believe this [coloring] process will further heighten the sexiness and the anarchic worldview that is distinct of Witchblade Takeru and look forward to seeing [it] myself."

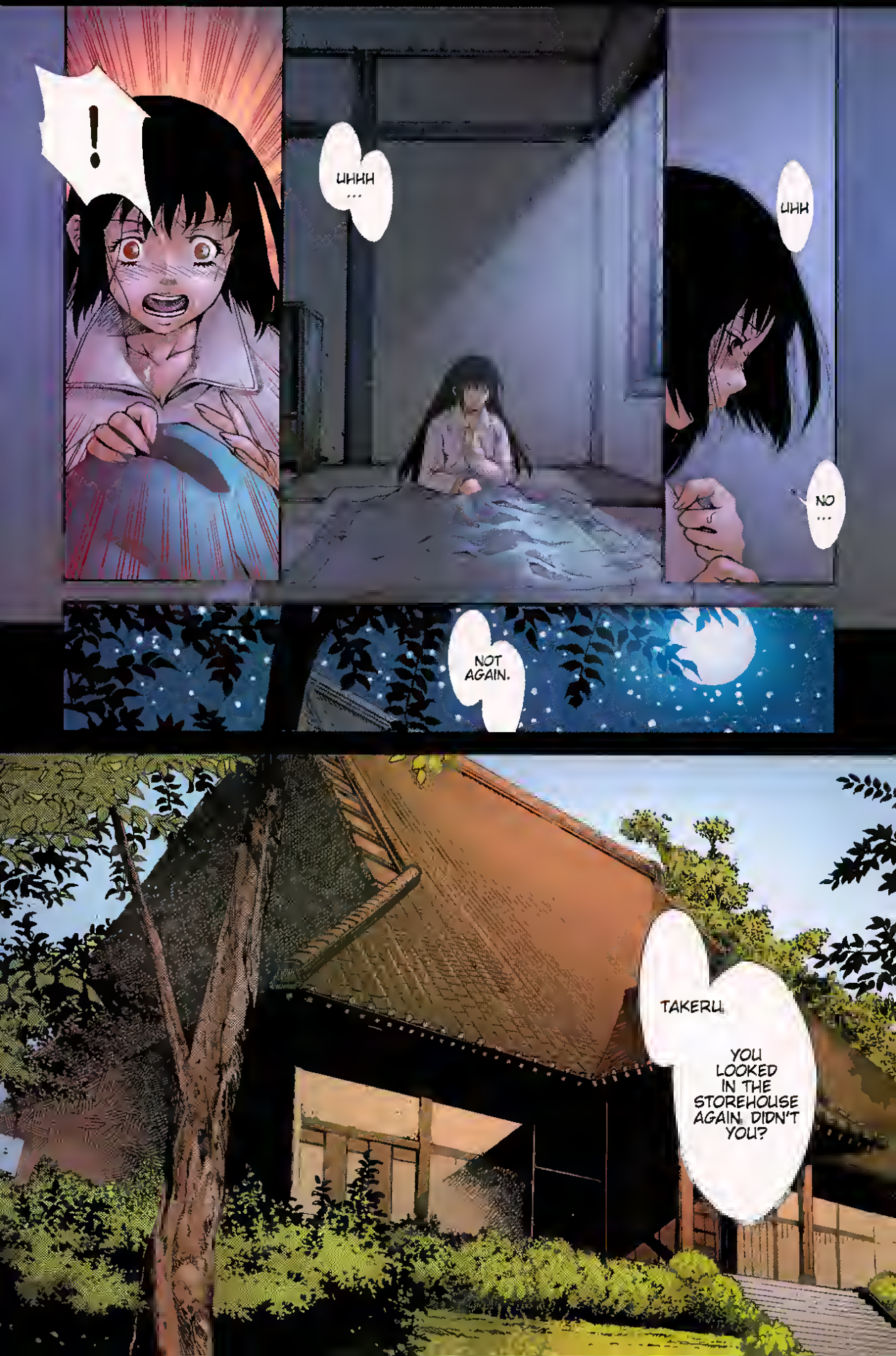
For those of you interested in experiencing a more traditional manga experience, you'll be happy to hear that we've partnered with Bandai Entertainment to release Witchblade: Manga in a manga digest format reading righ-to-left and with the original black and white art. The first volume will be out in the Summer of 2007. In the meantime, buckle up and dive into this groundbreaking and breathtaking manga experience. You won't be disappointed!

Sincerely,
The Top Cow Staff

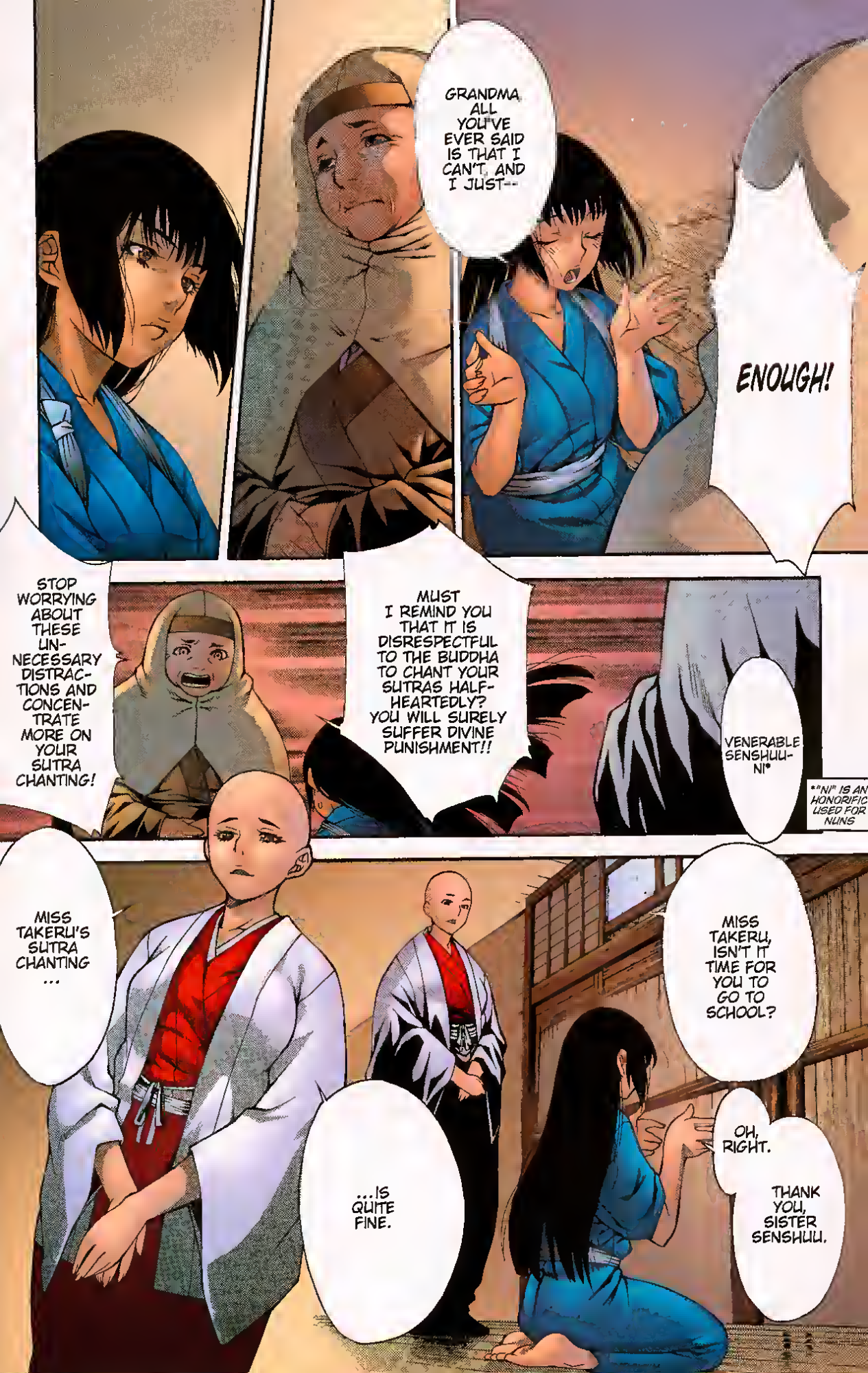
NO.....
DON'T LET HER GO NEAR IT.....
PLEASE.....
CHAPTER 1 DEMON'S HAND
I JUST KNOW...
SOMETHING AWFUL IS GOING TO HAPPEN...
NEVER...
DON'T LET HER NEAR.....

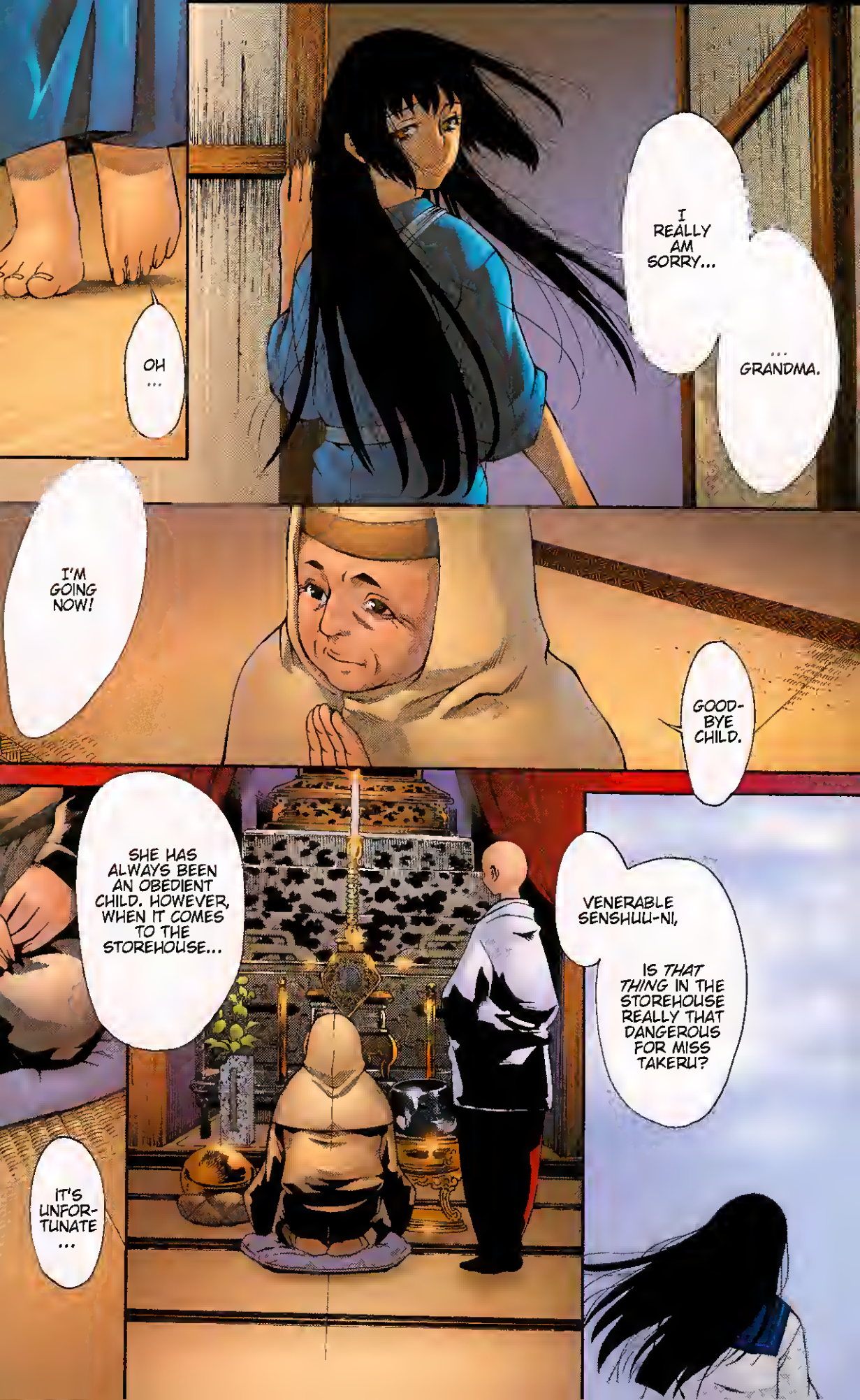
THAT...
DEMON'S HAND--
PLEASE ...
OH NO...
STOP!
GASP!
AH...
AHHH...

SLURPPPPPP!
AAAH...
AAAAAAHHH!

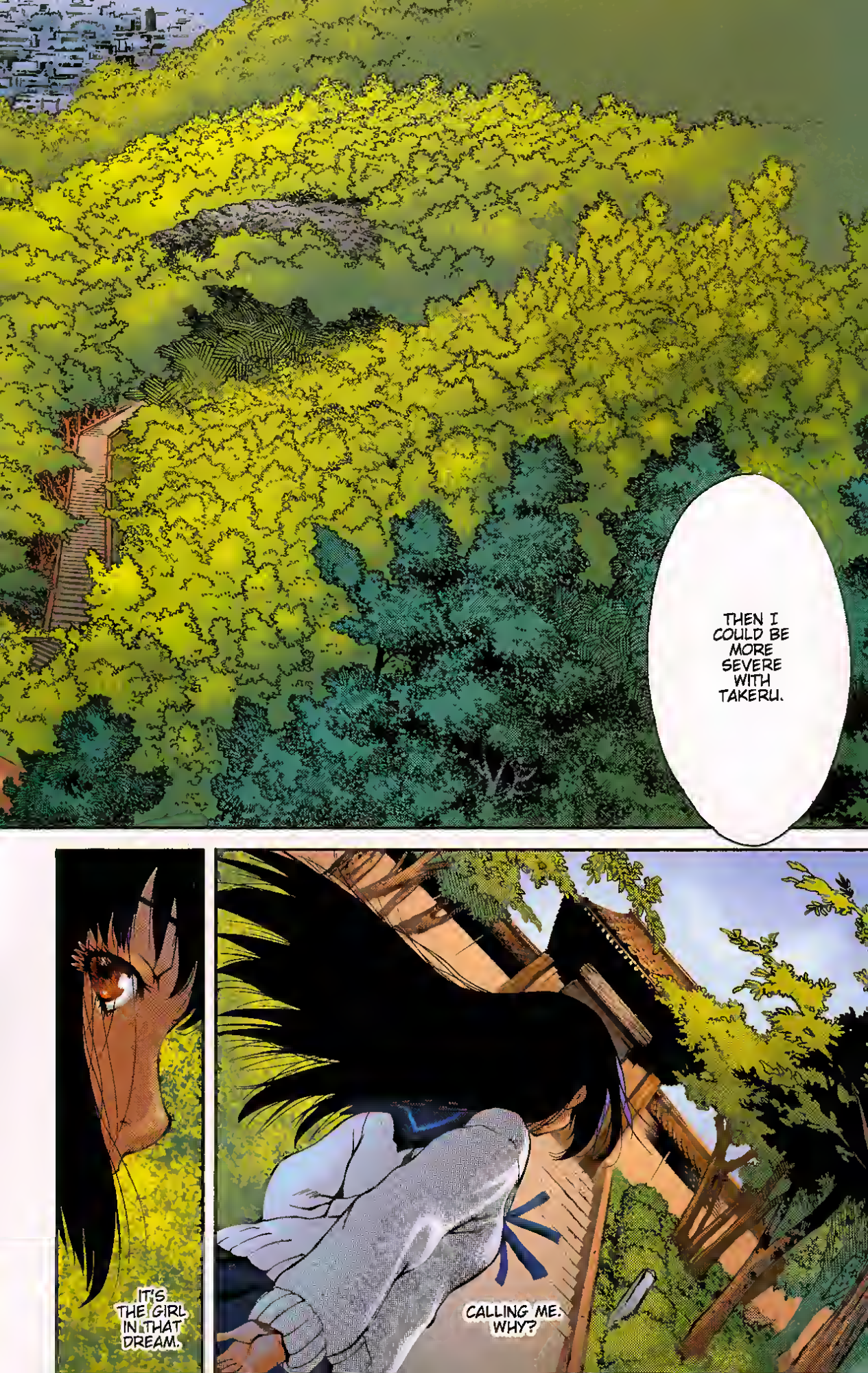

!
UHHH ...
UHH
NO ...
NOT AGAIN.
TAKERU.
YOU LOOKED IN THE STOREHOUSE AGAIN, DIDN'T YOU?

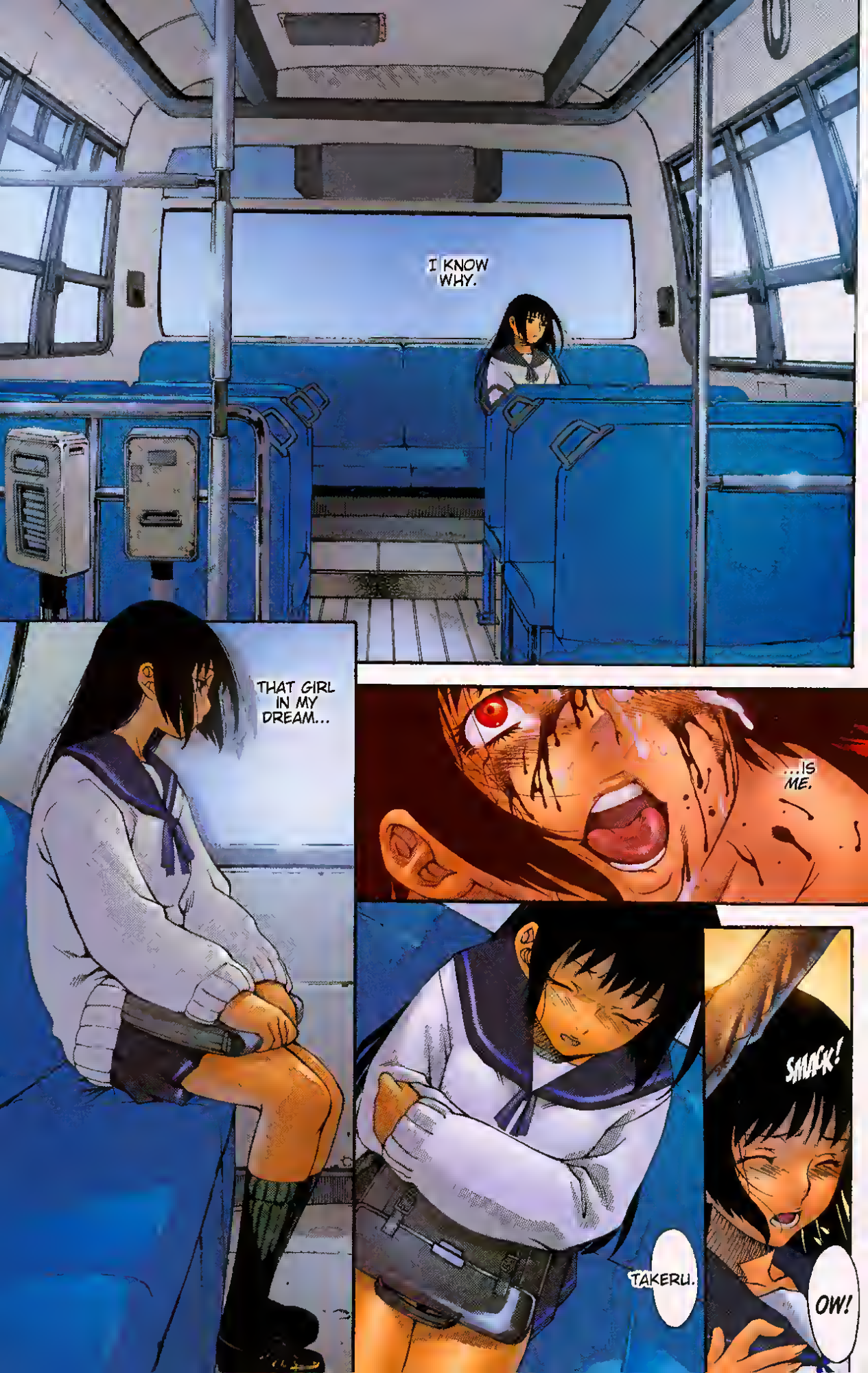
HOW MANY TIMES MUST I TELL YOU?!
I'VE WARNED YOU OVER AND OVER NOT TO GO NEAR THERE!
.....
I'M SORRY.
BOW
BUT--
I JUST WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH.
WHY CAN'T I GO NEAR IT?


GRANDMA, ALL YOU'VE EVER SAID IS THAT I CAN'T, AND I JUST--
ENOUGH!
STOP WORRYING ABOUT THESE UN-NECESSARY DISTRAC-TIONS AND CONCEN-TRATE MORE ON YOUR SUTRA CHANTING!
MUST I REMIND YOU THAT IT IS DISRESPECTFUL TO THE BUDDHA TO CHANT YOUR SUTRAS HALF-HEARTEDLY? YOU WILL SURELY SUFFER DIVINE PUNISHMENT!!
VENERABLE SENSHUU-NI*
*"NI" IS AN HONORIFIC USED FOR NUNS
MISS TAKERU'S SUTRA CHANTING ...
...IS QUITE FINE.
MISS TAKERU, ISN'T IT TIME FOR YOU TO GO TO SCHOOL?
OH, RIGHT.
THANK YOU, SISTER SENSHUU.

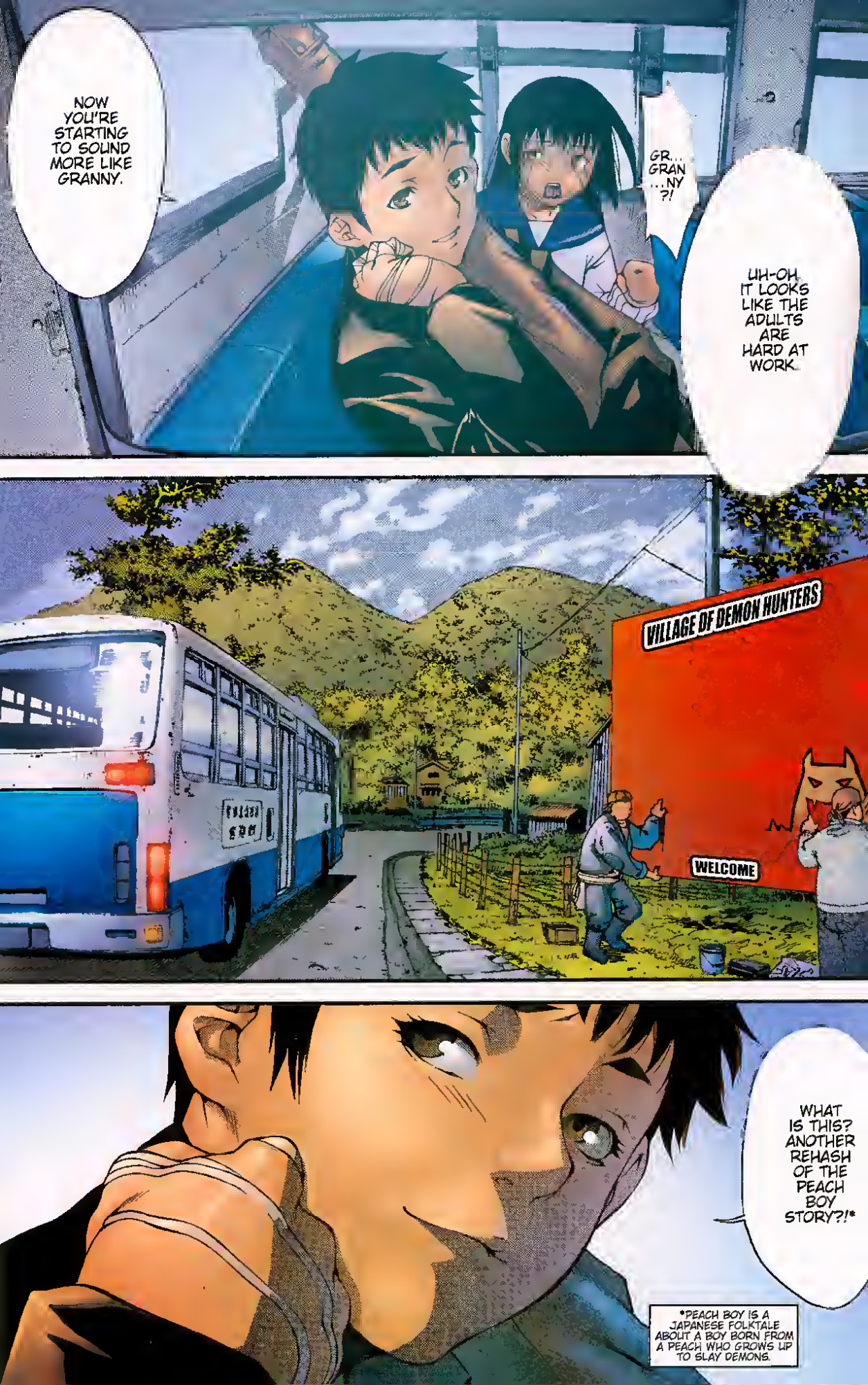

OH ...
I REALLY AM SORRY...
... GRANDMA.
I'M GOING NOW!
GOOD-BYE CHILD.
SHE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN OBEDIENT CHILD. HOWEVER, WHEN IT COMES TO THE STOREHOUSE...
VENERABLE SENSHUU-NI,
IS *THAT THING* IN THE STOREHOUSE REALLY THAT DANGEROUS FOR MISS TAKERU?
IT'S UNFOR-TUNATE ...

IF I ONLY KNEW THAT FOR SURE...
WHY?
WHY DO I GO NEAR THE STORE-HOUSE?


THEN I COULD BE MORE SEVERE WITH TAKERU.
IT'S THE GIRL IN THAT DREAM.
CALLING ME. WHY?

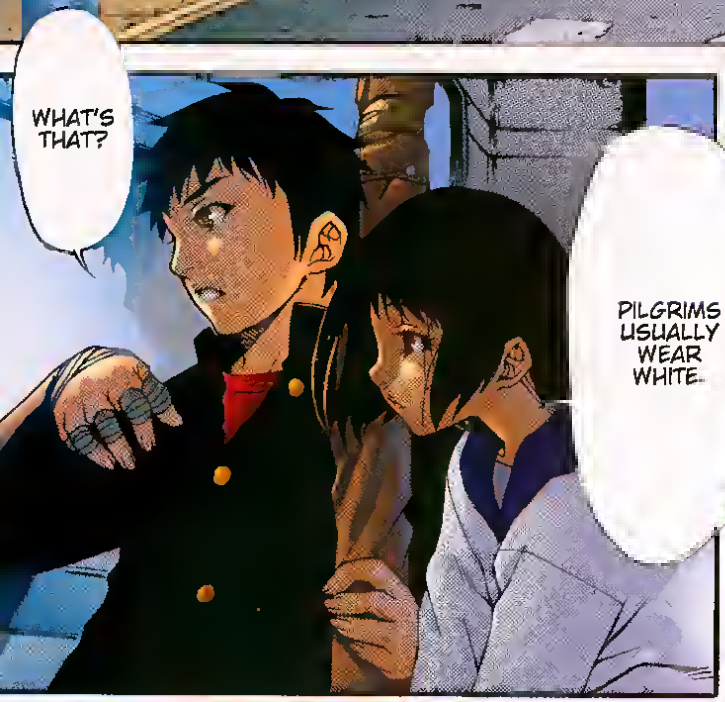

I KNOW WHY.
THAT GIRL IN MY DREAM...
...IS ME.
TAKERU.
SMACK!
OW!

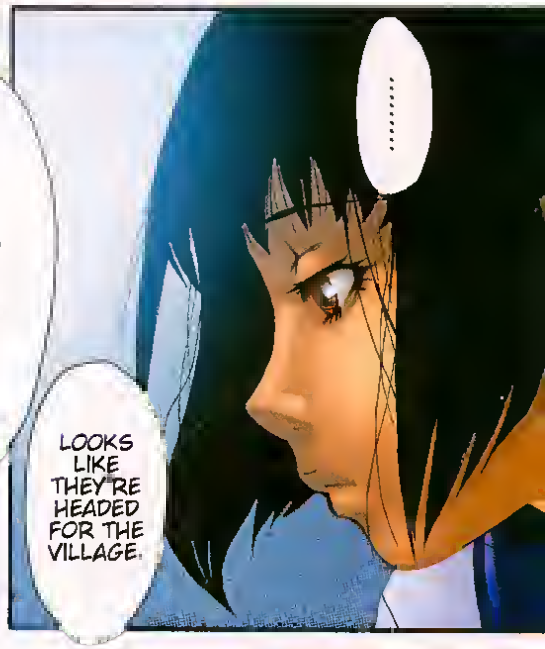
WHY ARE YOU ALL SPACED OUT?
KOU!
WHAT HAPPENED TO MORNING PRACTICE? YOU SKIPPED KENDO AGAIN.
I MISSED THE BUS.
AND THEY ONLY COME ONCE AN HOUR, YOU KNOW.
KOU, YOUR FATHER SAID THAT IF YOU WORKED AT IT, YOU COULD BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR TOURNAMENTS.
IF YOU MAKE A REAL EFFORT, EVEN THE BUDDHA WON'T FORSAKE YOU.
TAK-ERU ...


NOW YOU'RE STARTING TO SOUND MORE LIKE GRANNY.
GR... GRAN ...NY ?!
UH-OH. IT LOOKS LIKE THE ADULTS ARE HARD AT WORK.
VILLAGE OF DEMON HUNTERS
WELCOME
WHAT IS THIS? ANOTHER REHASH OF THE PEACH BOY STORY?!*
*PEACH BOY IS A JAPANESE FOLKTALE ABOUT A BOY BORN FROM A PEACH WHO GROWS UP TO SLAY DEMONS.

ARE YOU SURE THE SON OF DEMON HUNTERS SHOULD BE SAYING THINGS LIKE THAT?
YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING ME. IN THIS DAY AND AGE?
BUT YOUR FATHER WAS SO EXCITED ABOUT IT. HE'S GOING TO DONATE THE DEMON HUNTER'S SWORD.
I MEAN, HE'S OFFERING A FAMILY TREASURE FOR THE SAKE OF THE VILLAGE'S REVITALIZATION.
OH WELL, WHAT ELSE IS HE GOING TO DO WITH IT?! HE'S NOT GOING TO GIVE IT TO THE LIKES OF YOU.
SO. I DON'T WANT THAT THING ANYWAY.
BA-DOOM!

BOOM-BOOM
BOOM
TING!


WHAT'S THAT?
PILGRIMS USUALLY WEAR WHITE.


.....
LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE HEADED FOR THE VILLAGE.

BOOM-BOOM
TING!
BOOM

HEY, TAKERU...
ARE YOU FREE NEXT SUNDAY?
WHY? DO YOU HAVE TO RUN AN ERRAND FOR YOUR MOTHER OR SOME-THING?
MORNING!
TAKERU-CHAN!*
*"-CHAN" IS TACKED ON TO NAMES TO MAKE THEM SOUND CUTER AND CLOSE FRIENDS USE IT AS A NICKNAME
WHOA!
NO ...

M-MORNING, AYAKA.
OH, HI KOU-KUN.*
* "KUN" IS A COMMON ENDING FOR BOYS, BUT IT'S MORE INTIMATE TO NOT USE IT, SO IT'S USUALLY USED BY FRIENDS WHO DIDN'T GROW UP TOGETHER.
LET'S GO OUT ON A DATE NEXT SUNDAY!
TAKE-RU!
SQUEEZE
MORON.
I'M BUSY ON SUNDAY. BESIDES, DON'T YOU HAVE A BOYFRIEND?
WHA ...?!
WHAT-EVER. IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU WANT TO LIVE YOUR LIFE
YUP. WE HAD SEX ALL MORNING! CAN'T YOU SEE HOW I'M GLOWING?
HEY, AYAKA!!
OH, I JUST LOVE THAT ALOOF ATTITUDE OF YOURS!

YOU ARE SO WRONG, AYAKA! ASKING ANOTHER BOY OUT WHEN YOU ALREADY HAVE A BOY-FRIEND!
AND WHAT ABOUT-- YOU KNOW --
--THE SEX?
SERIOUSLY! TALKING SO LOUD ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT IS--
COME ON, TAKERU-CHAN! YOU'RE SO UPTIGHT!
IT'S CAUSE YOU'RE A VIRGIN!
!!!
YOU'D THINK LIVING AT A NUNNERY WOULD MAKE FOR A PERFECT SEDUCTION!
WHY DON'T YOU SLEEP WITH KOU-KUN AND GET IT OVER WITH?
THAT'S NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN! I'M NOT LIKE YOU!
THAT'S A SHAME. IT FEELS SO GOOD, YOU KNOW.
STOP IT!
IF YOU KEEP SAYING THINGS LIKE THAT .....
BUDDHA WILL SURELY PUNISH YOU!!
THERE YOU GO AGAIN, TAKERU-CHAN, SOUNDING LIKE YOUR GRANDMA!
AND IN FRONT OF EVERYONE, TOO.
UH...

BOOM
UP THERE.
THAT SOUND IS...
BOOM BOOM
TAP TAP
BOOM
DRUMS OF SOME KIND...
BOOM

Kiii

I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
WHY I FEEL SO UNEASY.
BA-DUM
BA-DUM
BA-DUM
OH---
BA-DUM
NO.....

BA-DUM
AAAA

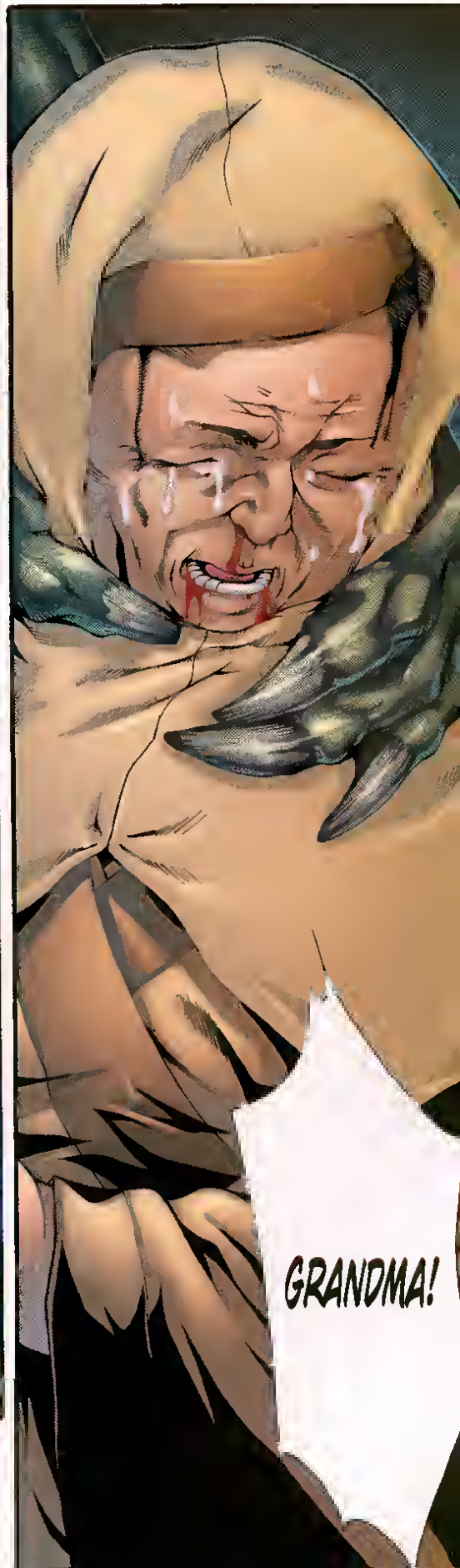
I...
I'M ...
I'M SORRY.
I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD. I HAVE TO GO...
HEY, IBARAKI!
SIR!
SSSKRR!
I'LL WALK HER HOME.
HEY, MINA-MOTO?!
NO WAY! TAKERU-CHAN, YOU'RE FINALLY GONNA GO FOR IT!

PANT
PANT
TAKERU!
KOU!
THIS SENIOR LET ME BORROW HIS BIKE.
GET ON!!
HUMMMMMMMM
THANKS, KOU.
BUT I'VE GOT TO GET HOME FAST. I KNOW SOMETHING'S WRONG!
YOU GOT IT.
VROOOM VROOOM

TWO KIDS ARE APPROACHING. IF THEY MAKE TROUBLE, KILL THEM.
I'LL GET IT MYSELF.
GRANDMA!

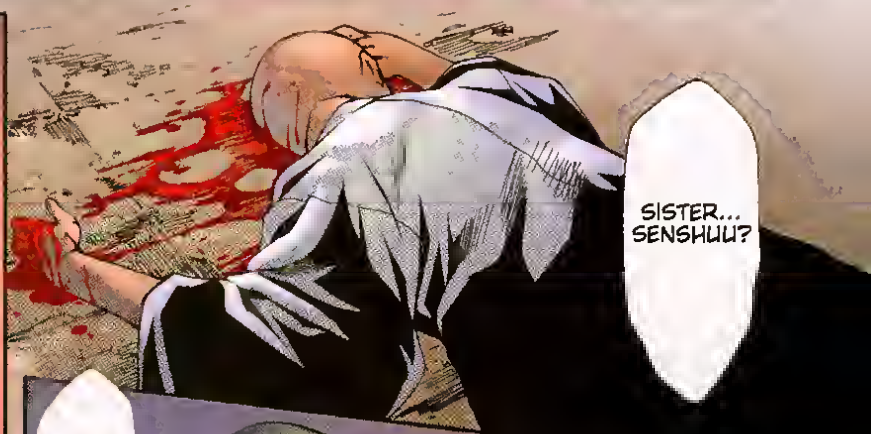
UHM... TAKERU? THIS IS...
IT CAN'T BE.
GRAN...
GRAND-MA...
TAKERU? IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY.
WHY ...
THE... STORE HOUSE ...
YOU STAY RIGHT HERE.
I'LL GO LOOK FOR HER OUTSIDE!

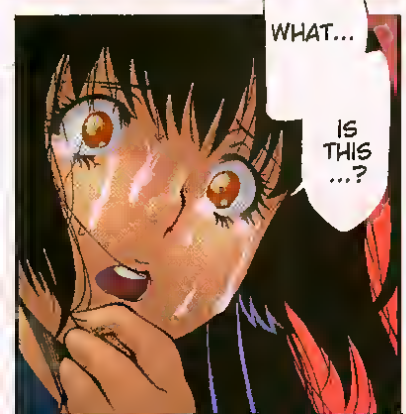
IT'S THE STORE-HOUSE!
NO...
DON'T LET HER GO NEAR IT...
NO... NO...
THE DOOR ...IT'S OPEN!
GRAND-MA!
SOMETHING TERRIBLE WILL HAPPEN...


GRANDMA!

T... TAKERU.
RUN...

G... GRAND-MA...

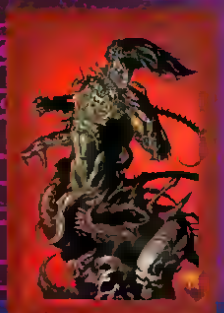

SISTER... SENSHUU?


WHAT... IS THIS ...?

AS EX-PECT-ED...
THE WITCHBLADE IS SURROUNDED BY WOMEN.

KA-ROUCH!
TAKERU...
RUN...
WOMEN... THEY AMUSE ME...
OH... NO...
GULP!
WITCH-BLADE?
OH...
HOW NICE... I WILL ENJOY MAKING YOU CRY...

ON SALE IN FEBRUARY



The Darkness: Level #3
(W) Paul Jenkins, David Wahl
(A) Eric Basaldaa

Witchblade #106
(W) Ron Marz
(A) Stjapan Sajic

City of Heroes #18
(W) Sean Fish
(A) Mark A. Robinson

Plus!

The Agency vol. 1 tpb
Collects issues #1-#6, 192 pages, includes bonus materials and cover gallery!
(W) Paul Jenkins
(A) Kyle Hotz

Hunter-Killer 6 pack!
Fans ask your retailer about this special package offer! Collects issues #4-#8 plus the *Hunter-Killer* scriptbook!
(W) Mark Wald
(A) Marc Silvestri, Eric Basaldua

Ask your retailer about our lithos!

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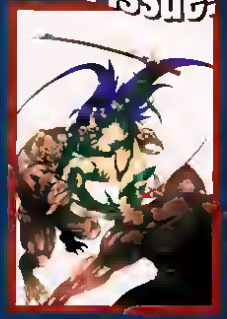
Chaz Riggs -production manager
Phil Smith -managing editor
Zach Matheny -production

The Darkness takes over in 2007!

With the highly anticipated *The Darkness* video game from 2K bringing gamers into the world of *The Darkness*, Top Cow has released several 10th Anniversary *The Darkness* products including *The Darkness* vol. 5 tpb *DEMON INSIDE* and the special editon *Art of The Darkness* featuring the best art from the series, game, and more. Not to be outdone *The Darkness ULTIMATE COLLECTION* brings together the essential *COMING OF AGE* origin story arc by Garth Ennis and Marc Silvestri, and the *RESURRECTION* story arc, by Paul Jenkins and Dale Keown, which re-launched *The Darkness* and brought Jackie to a new level of prominence.

Next Issue!



Witchblade Manga #2

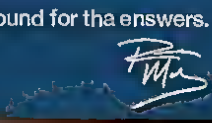
In this issue Takeru and Kou return from school to the monastery only to find the entire place in shambles. As Kou searches for the nuns outside, Takeru remembers the mysterious, forbidden claw locked away inside. But can she get to it in time?

From the desk of:
Ron Marz

You're asking, "Why give the Witchblede to a naw baarer?" Or maybe soma of you are asking, "Why, efter more than e hundred issues, teke it away from Sara?" And I know soma of you ere asking, "Who the hell do you think you are, Marz, screwing up our book?"

All valid questions. I'm avan asking myself some of them. I maan, after writing Sara for mora than two yaers, I like her. And I'm not dona telling stories with her, not by a long shot. But I also don't want to tall the same stories over and over again. That's why we're doing something a little different in Witchblade, which will lead into the summer crossover, First Born.

You've got questions. Stick around for tha enswers.

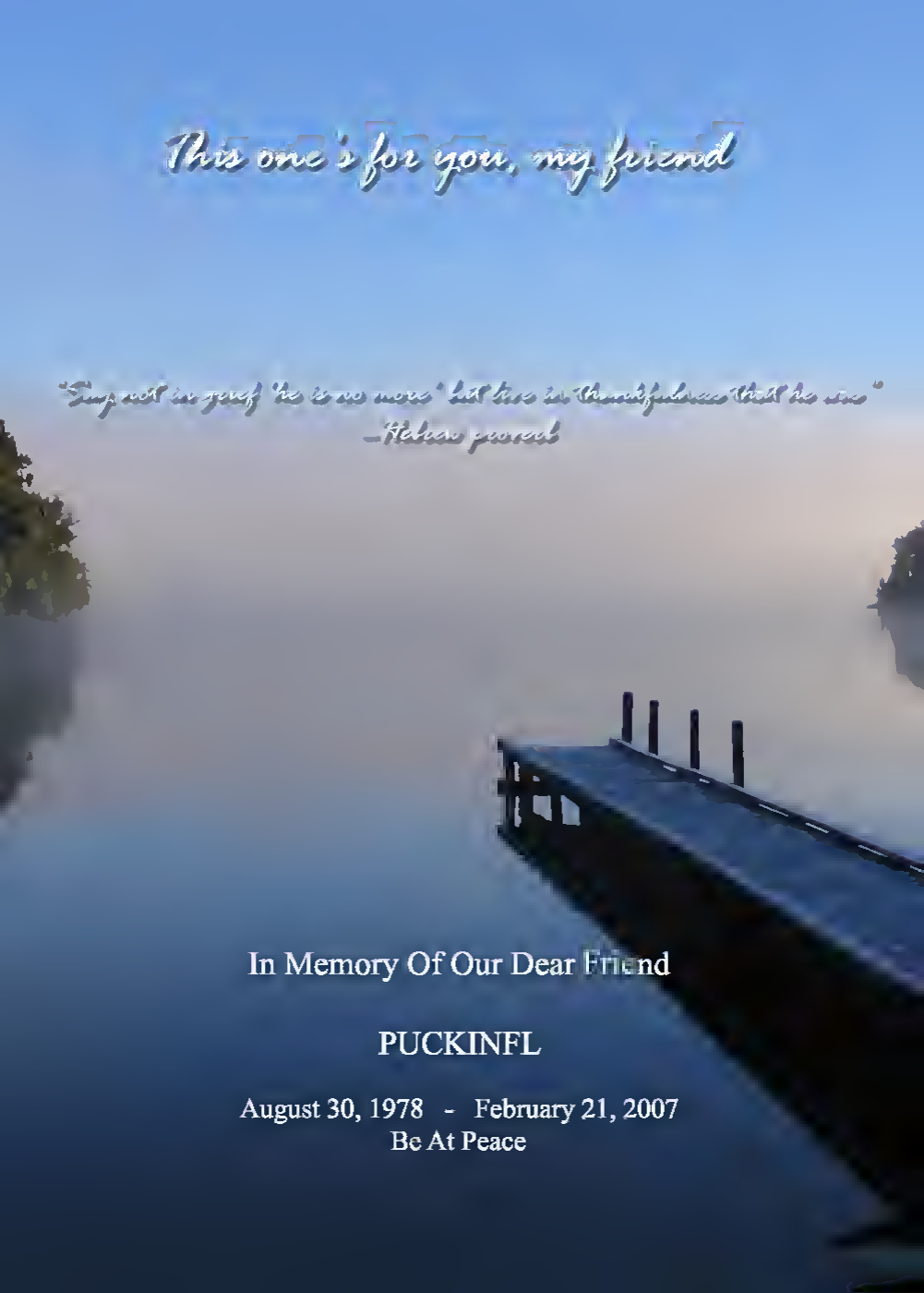


KRICK
CRACK
OH... UH...
KA-RA-SH!!!
BOOM!
?!
TAKERU?!

OH ...
AHHH ...
TAKERU!
WHAT'S GOING ON?!
UHHNNNG
T... TAKE-RU... CHILD ...
PANT
PANT

MY BODY... BURN-ING...
?!
!
UHHNNG...
OOH...
FEELS SO HOT...

I FEEL SO HOT...
AND SWEET!
TO BE CONTINUED



In Memory Of Our Dear Friend

PUCKINFL

August 30, 1978 - February 21, 2007

Be At Peace

GRAVES
THE MINUTEMEN

WITCHBLADE

TAKERU MANGA

2

Kobayashi
Sumita
Blond

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FOR TOP COW PRODUCTIONS, INC.:
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ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO:
WITCHBLADE MANGA
c/o Top Cow Productions, Inc.
10350 Santa Monica Blvd., #100
Los Angeles, CA 90025
eMail: fanmail@topcowent.com

FOR image COMICS Erik Larsen publisher

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WRITER - YASUKO KOBAYASHI
ARTIST - KAZASA SUMITA
COLORIST - BLOND
LETTERS - TROY PETERI
DESIGN - CHAZ RIGGS
TRANSLATOR - SHOKO OONO
ENGLISH ADAPTATION - BRIAN BUCCELLATO

COVER A - KAZASA SUMITA
COVER B - GONZO ANIMATION

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY AKITA SHOTEN AS WITCHBLADE TAKERU.

DEDICATED TO IMAI MAKIKO

WITCHBLADE™

TAKERU MANGA

TAKERU?!
IS THAT REALLY YOU? TAKERU?
SO HOT...
FEEL LIKE I AM BURNING INSIDE...

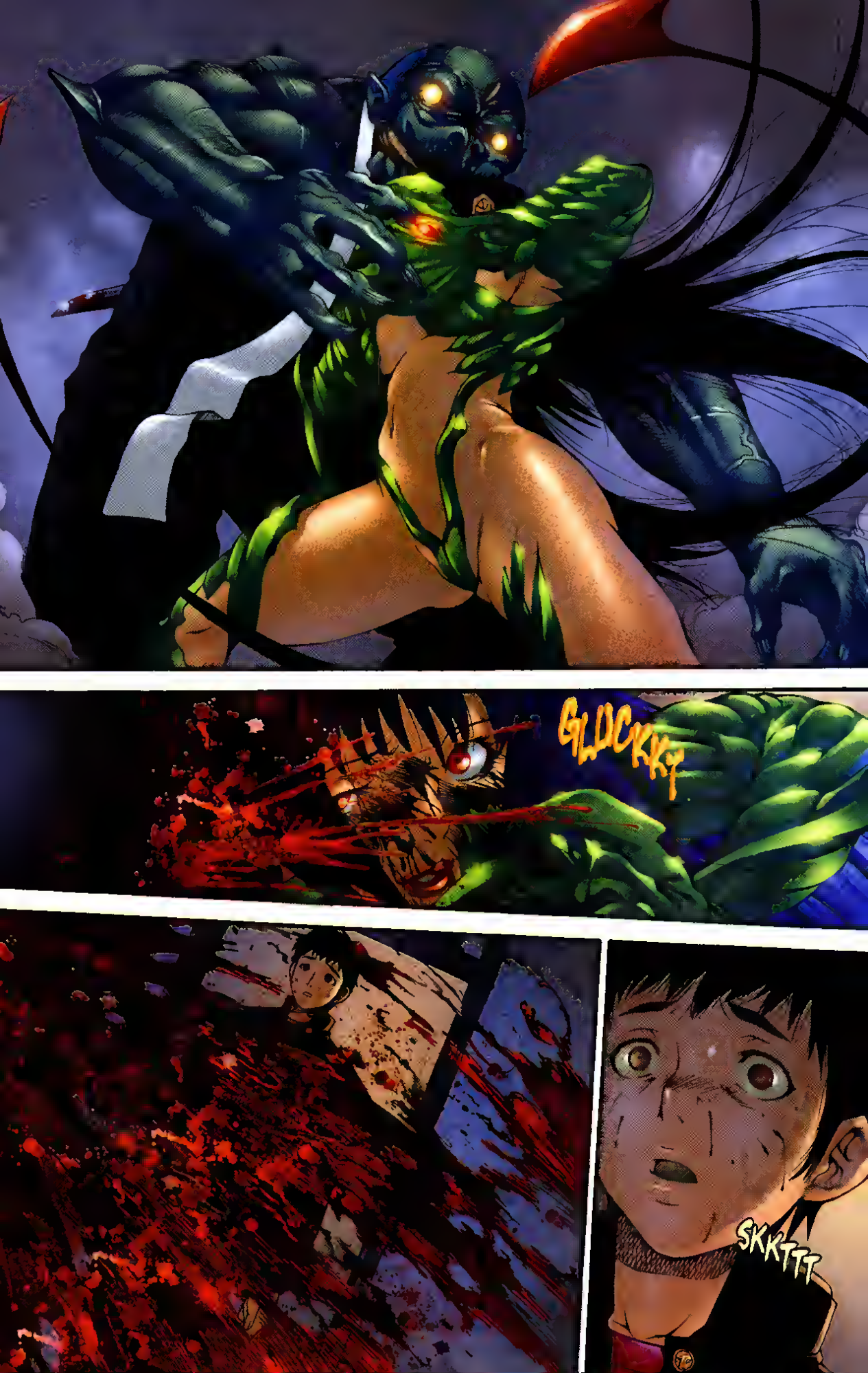
CHAPTER 2
PRELUDE TO A LEGEND

YOU SAID YOU WOULD MAKE ME CRY?
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?
WE... WILL...
SHOW ME...
RIIIIP
RIIIIP
NICE AND SLOW...

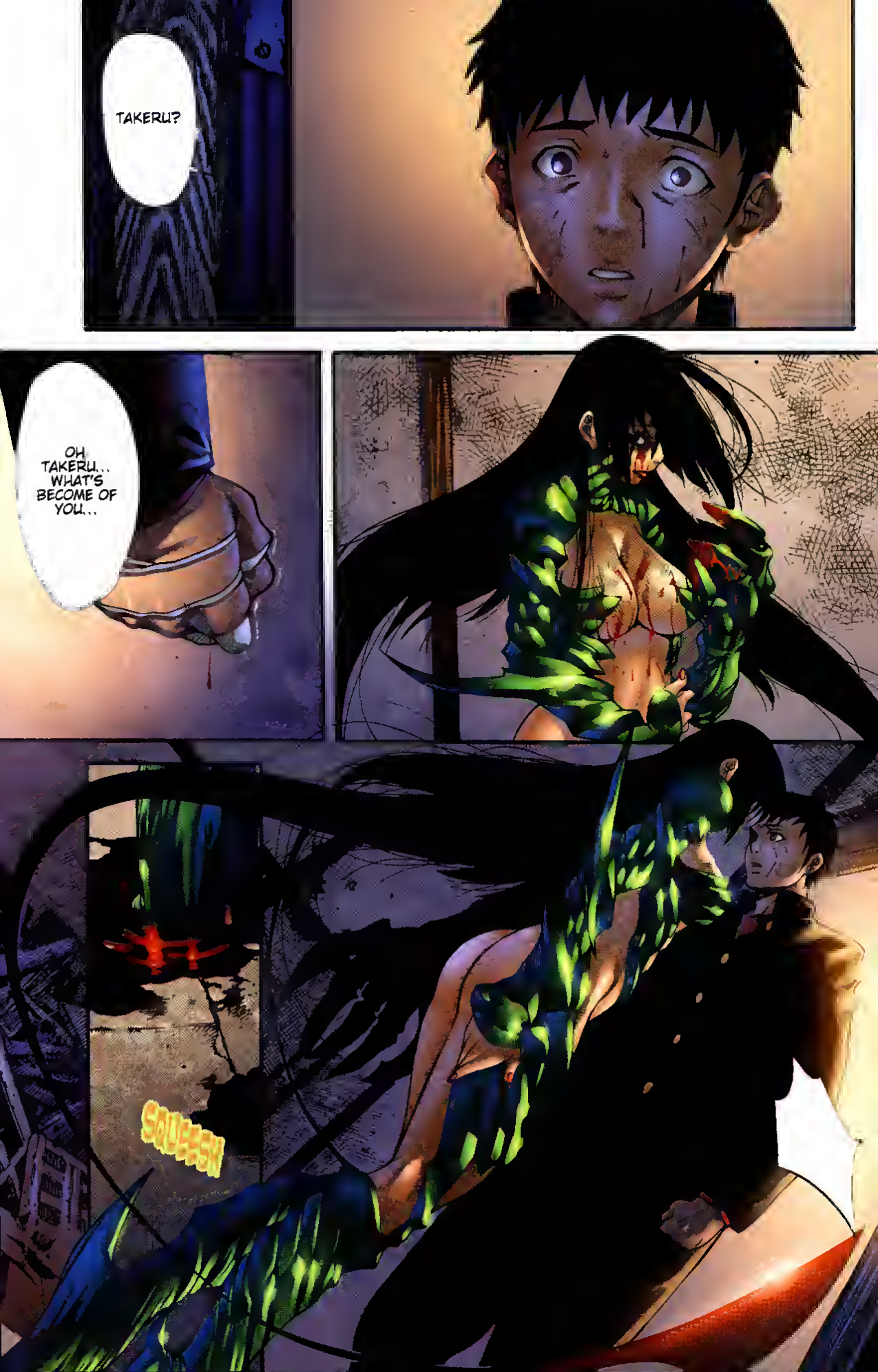
GRRRRRAAAAGK!
WOOOSH
KRUNCH

THUD
SKKTTTT
GLLLLKKKT
UHNNNNG...
BAH-DUM
OHHHH...
I WANT...
SUCKEE

GRR-OOWLLLL!
MORE...


GLDCKKK
SKKTTT

OHHH
MORE...


TAKERU?
OH TAKERU... WHAT'S BECOME OF YOU...
SQUEESH

IT'S OVER.
HOW BORING... I WAS JUST GETTING STARTED.
I WISH THERE WAS MORE.
RIPP...
RIPPPPPP...
PLEASE ... STOP ...
CHOMP

OW!
NITCH
!!!
TAKERU!!!
KOU?
I SAID STOP!!!
UHNNNGGG...

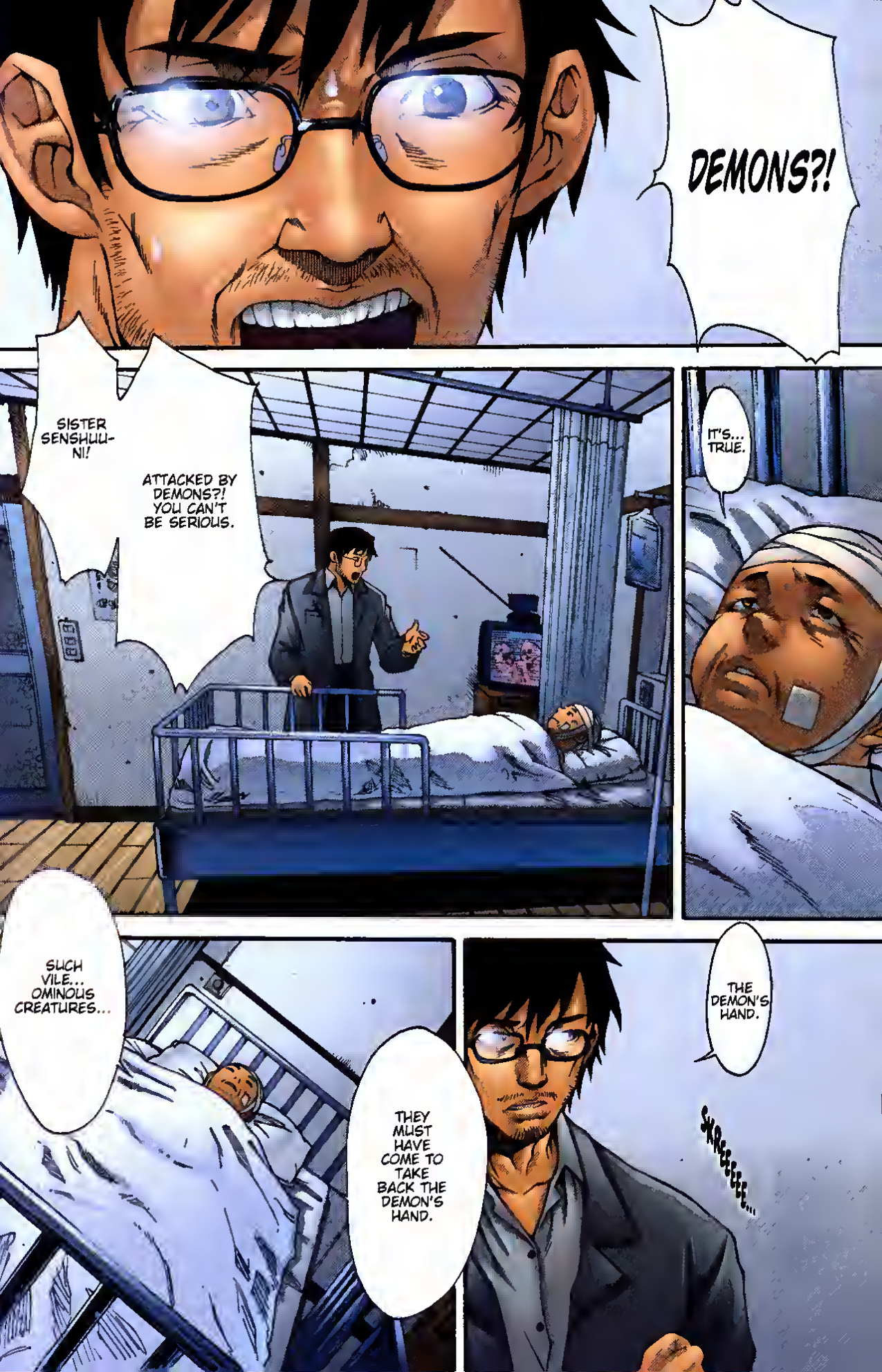
OH, TAKERU ...
WHAT THE...
HEY, LOOK!
HMM?

LOOK! SHUUMEIJI TEMPLE IS ON FIRE
LET'S GO!
YES.
IT IS THE WITCHBLADE.
THERE IS A GIRL NOW WIELDING IT...
TELL MASTER HOUGEN TO SEND REINFORCEMENTS.

MINAMOTO CLINIC
TAKERU
...

PLEASE TELL ME...
WHAT WAS ALL OF THAT?
I WANT...
MORE!

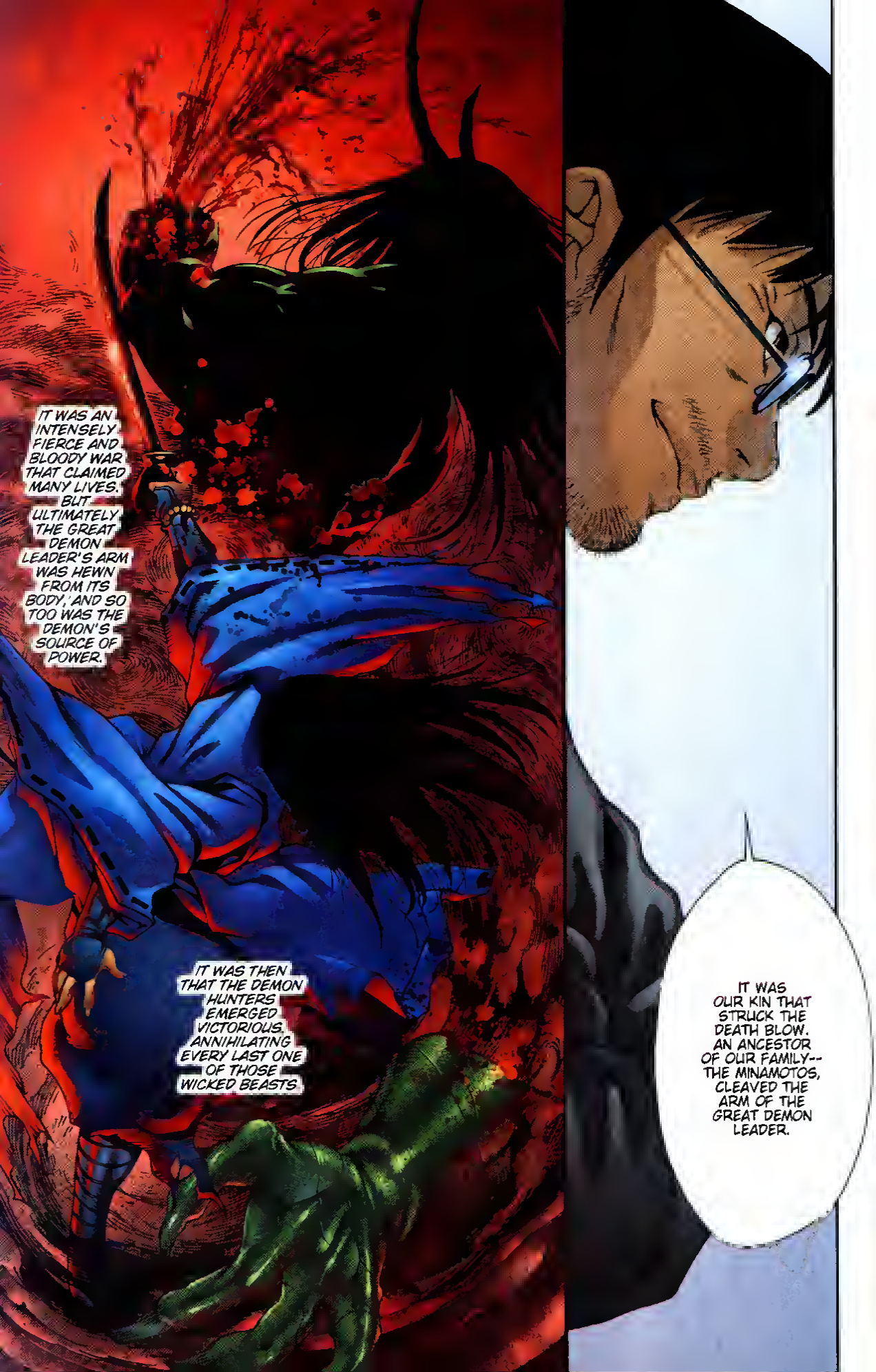
THAT WASN'T REALLY YOU.
WAS IT?
RIGHT?
TAKERU?


DEMONS?!
SISTER SENSHUU-NI!
ATTACKED BY DEMONS?! YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS.
IT'S... TRUE.
SUCH VILE... OMINOUS CREATURES...
THEY MUST HAVE COME TO TAKE BACK THE DEMON'S HAND.
THE DEMON'S HAND.
SKREEEEE...

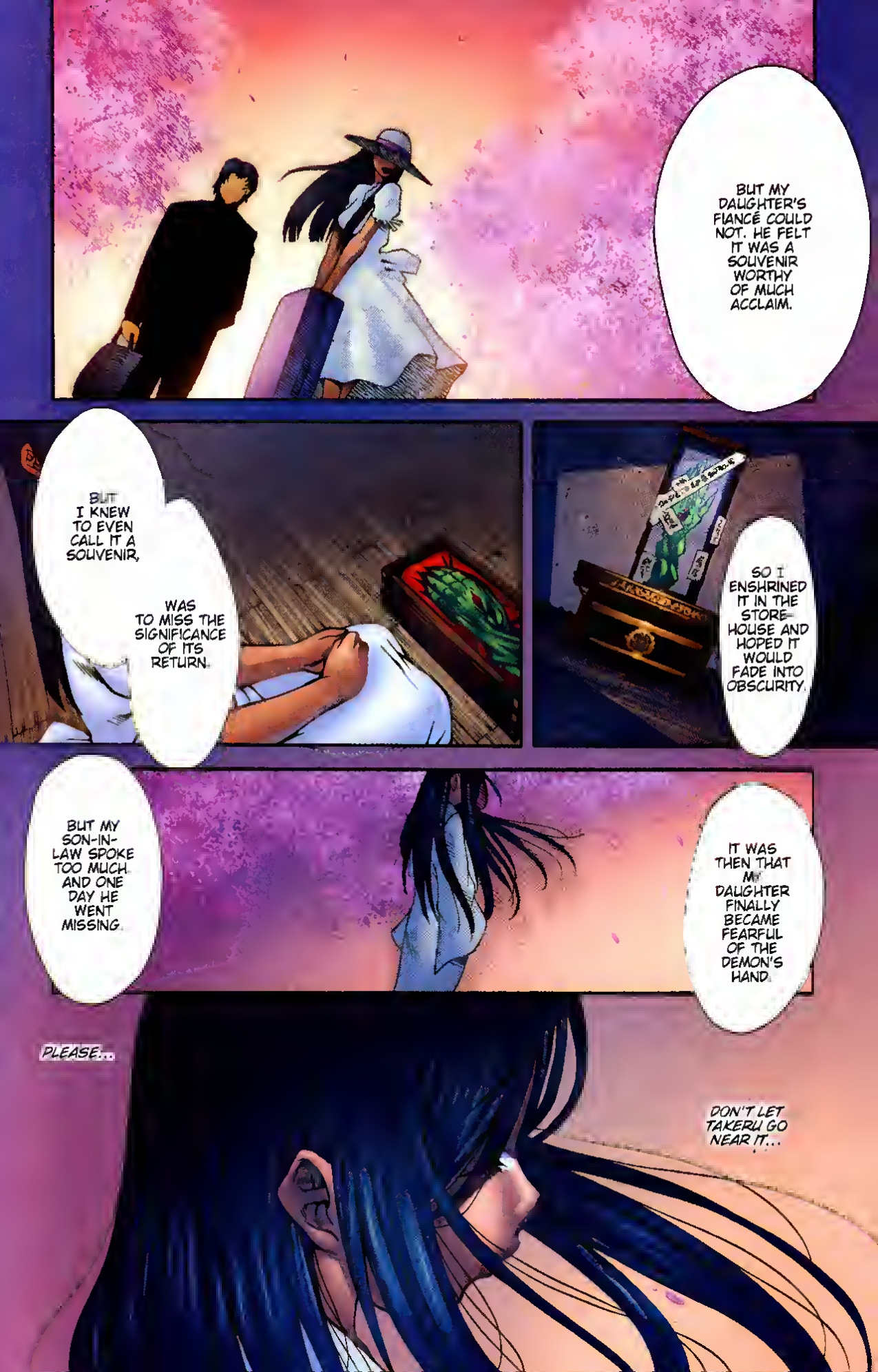
KOU! DO YOU HEAR ME?!
KOU DON'T YOU DARE COME IN WITHOUT KNOCKING FIRST.
THAT'S THE THING ON TAKERU'S WRIST, ISN'T IT?
GRANNY! WHAT IS THE DEMON'S HAND?
AND WHAT IS HAPPENING TO TAKERU?!
CAN'T LET HER... NEAR IT. THE... DEMON'S HAND.
AS I FEARED.
WE SHOULDN'T HAVE LET HER GO NEAR IT...

OF COURSE I DO. WE ARE DEMON HUNTERS, KOU.
HAD YOU STUDIED YOUR HERITAGE MORE DILIGENTLY, YOU WOULD KNOW THAT IS YOUR LEGACY.
DAD?! YOU KNEW ABOUT THIS?!
HOW CAN THIS BE, SISTER SENSHUU-NI?
WASN'T THE DEMON'S HAND STOLEN FROM THE SHUUMEJI TEMPLE A LONG TIME AGO?
GRANNY! IS THIS TRUE?
I'M AFRAID SO...

AT ONE TIME THIS VILLAGE WAS OVERRUN WITH RAVENOUS DEMONS THAT DEVOURED HUMANS...
BUT, THEN, THE DEMON HUNTERS APPEARED. SOME SAY, THEY WERE BORNE OF NECESSITY. OTHERS SAY, THEY CAME FROM THE HEAVENS TO WAGE WAR WITH THE DEMONS. AND WAGE WAR THEY DID...


IT WAS AN INTENSELY FIERCE AND BLOODY WAR THAT CLAIMED MANY LIVES. BUT ULTIMATELY THE GREAT DEMON LEADER'S ARM WAS HEWN FROM ITS BODY, AND SO TOO WAS THE DEMON'S SOURCE OF POWER.
IT WAS THEN THAT THE DEMON HUNTERS EMERGED VICTORIOUS, ANNIHILATING EVERY LAST ONE OF THOSE WICKED BEASTS
IT WAS OUR KIN THAT STRUCK THE DEATH BLOW. AN ANCESTOR OF OUR FAMILY-- THE MINAMOTOS, CLEAVED THE ARM OF THE GREAT DEMON LEADER.

ALL OF THE DEMONS WERE KILLED AND BURIED. BUT THE DEMON LEADER'S ARM WAS LEFT IN THE SHUUMEIJI TEMPLE.
IT IS NO LEGEND, AKENO.
TWENTY YEARS AGO...
BUT IT WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN STOLEN MANY YEARS AGO. AND SINCE REDUCED TO MERE LEGEND.
MY DAUGHTER DISCOVERED IT WHILE STUDYING ABROAD. SHE BROUGHT IT BACK IN HER LUGGAGE BUT I DARED TELL NO ONE.
IT WAS HERE?!
I KNEW THAT NEWS OF ITS RETURN WOULD BRING ONLY ANXIETY AND TREPIDATION TO THE VILLAGE.
SO I KEPT ITS EXISTENCE A SECRET.


BUT MY DAUGHTER'S FIANCÉ COULD NOT. HE FELT IT WAS A SOUVENIR WORTHY OF MUCH ACCLAIM.
BUT I KNEW TO EVEN CALL IT A SOUVENIR,
WAS TO MISS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ITS RETURN.
SO I ENSHRINED IT IN THE STORE-HOUSE AND HOPED IT WOULD FADE INTO OBSCURITY.
BUT MY SON-IN-LAW SPOKE TOO MUCH AND ONE DAY HE WENT MISSING.
IT WAS THEN THAT MY DAUGHTER FINALLY BECAME FEARFUL OF THE DEMON'S HAND.
PLEASE...
DON'T LET TAKERU GO NEAR IT...

UNTIL THE DAY SHE DIED...
SHE BEGGED ME...
STILL, I NEVER IMAGINED ANYTHING LIKE THIS WOULD HAPPEN.
I AM A FOOL. I SHOULD HAVE MOVED IT TO ANOTHER TEMPLE...

PLEASE, SISTER SENSHUU-NI... IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.
BESIDES, TAKERU-CHAN SEEMS TO BE FINE RIGHT NOW.
NO... THE WAY SHE LOOKED ...
SHE LOOKED LIKE A...
DEMON.

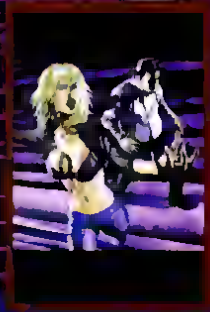
TO BE CONTINUED

WORLD MOOS

ON SALE IN MARCH

Witchblade/The Punisher
(W) Ron Marz
(A) Adriece Melo

***The Darkness:* Level 4**
(W) Paul Jenkins/David Wohl
(A) Patrick Blaine



***Freshmen II* #4**
(W) Hugh Sterbakov
(A) Will Conrad

Plus!

***The Unusual Suspects* trade paperback!**
96 pages, benefiting **HERO™**, helping comic creators in need!
(W) Dan Wickline
(A) Templesmith, Rodriguez, Jones and more!

The Darkness*: *Ultimate Collection
Collects issues vol 1 issues #1-#6 plus vol 2 issues #1-#6!
(W) Garth Ennis, Paul Jenkins
(A) Marc Silvestri, Dale Keown

Ask your retailer about our lithos!

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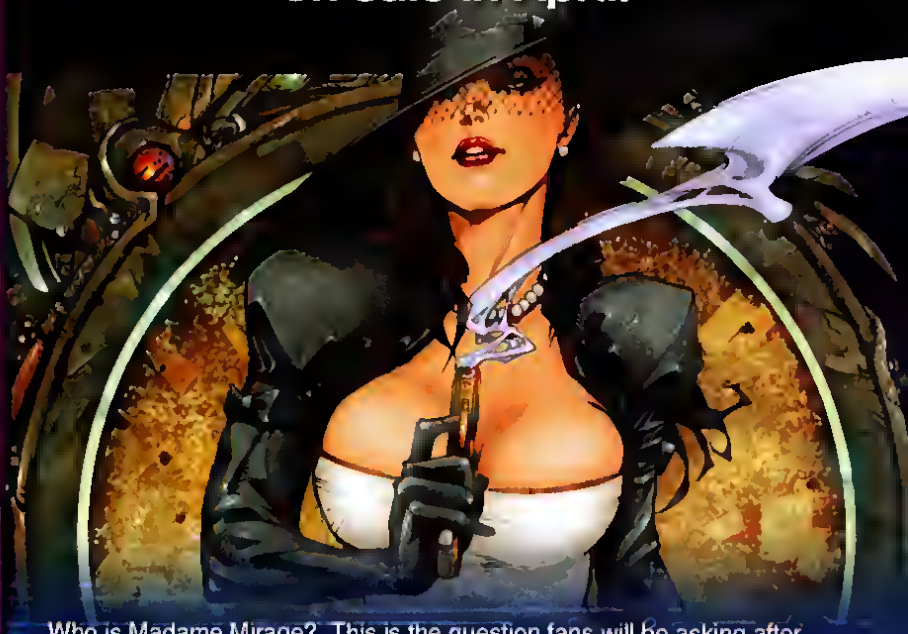
Zach Matheny, Joshua Cozine -production
Adrian Nicita -webmaster

Madame Mirage: First Look on sale in April!



Who is Madame Mirage? This is the question fans will be asking after Paul Dini (*Detective Comics*, *Witchblade Animated*) brings his latest creation to Top Cow. Dini, best known for his work on *Batman the Animated Series* and *Lost* brings his unique vision to Top Cow, aided by artistic find Kenneth Rocafort (*Hunter-Killer*). April's *First Look* kicks off the anticipetion for Mey's debut issue, offering preview pages, character designs, and more behind-the-scenes goodies from Dini and Rocafort.

Who is Madame Mirage? The mystery unfolds this April from Top Cow.

Next Issue!

***Witchblade* Manga #3**

In the next issue Takeru joins with the Witchblade, the Demon Claw, for the first time. And as Takeru struggles against the power of the Witchblade, Kou also realizes his own destiny and struggles with the burden of his heritage.

From the desk of:

Ron Marz

You're asking, "Why give the Witchblade to a new bearer?" Or maybe some of you are asking, "Why, after more than a hundred issues, take it away from Sara?" And I know some of you are asking, "Who the hell do you think you are, Marz, screwing up our book?"

All valid questions. I'm even asking myself some of them. I mean, after writing Sara for more than two years, I like her. And I'm not done telling stories with her, not by a long shot. But I also don't want to tell the same stories over and over again. That's why we're doing something a little different in Witchblade, which will lead into the summer crossover, First Born.

You've got questions. Stick around for the answers.

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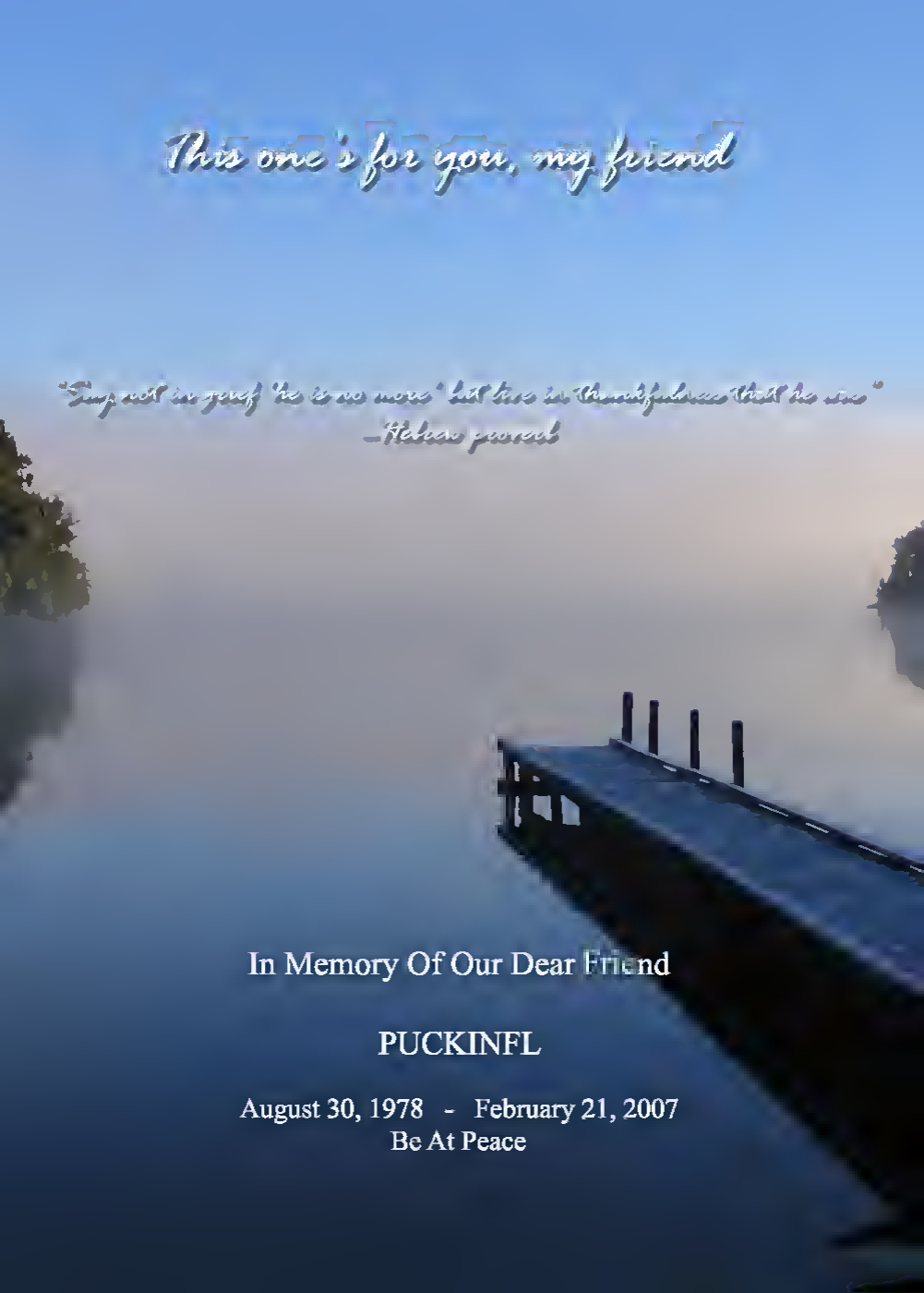

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ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO:

WITCHBLADE MANGA
c/o Top Cow Productions, Inc.
P.O. Box 1850 Santa Monica Blvd., #100
Los Angeles, CA 90025
E-Mail: fanmail@topcowent.com

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ARTIST - KAZASA SUMITA
COLORIST - BLOND
LETTERS - TROY PETERI
DESIGN - CHAZ RIGGS

TRANSLATOR - SHOKO OONO
ENGLISH ADAPTATION - BRIAN BUCCELLATO

COVER A - KAZASA SUMITA

Originally published by Akita Shoten as Witchblade Takeru.

Dedicated to Ken Iyadomi and Robert Place Napton

Witchblade™

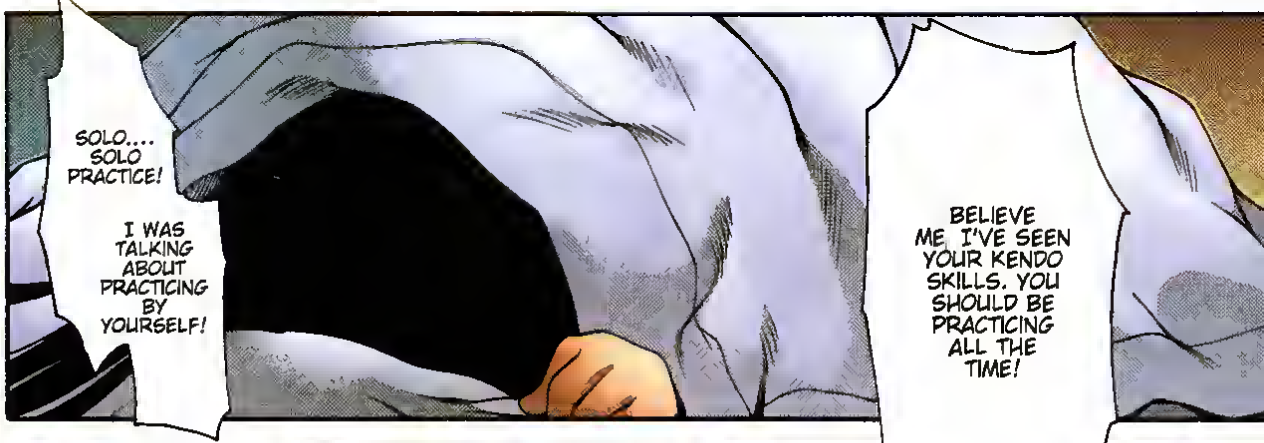
TAKERU MANGA

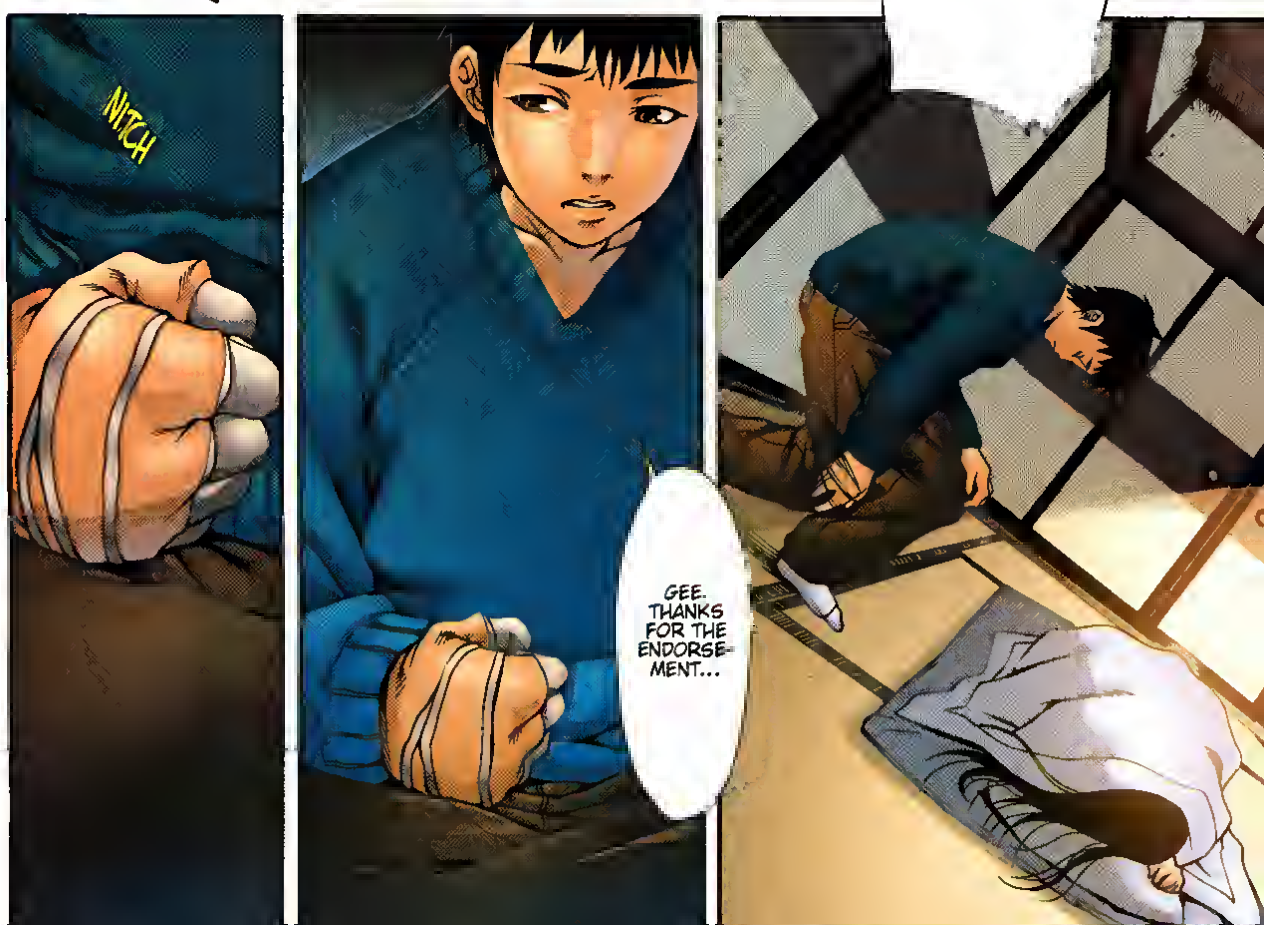
YOU AWAKE?
GROAN
KOU? ARE GRANDMA AND SISTER SEISHUU OKAY?
MY DAD'S TAKING CARE OF GRANNY.
BUT SISTER SEISHUU... HER WOUNDS WERE SO DEEP THEY HAD TO TAKE HER TO EMERGENCY.
I SEE ...

AND UHM... THE TEMPLE?
BURNED TO THE GROUND.
THE POLICE ARE INVESTIGATING, BUT...
THEY PRETTY MUCH ASSUME IT WAS ROBBERS.
IT'S NOT LIKE ANYONE WOULD EVER THINK MONSTERS LIKE THAT ACTUALLY EXISTED.
TAKERU,
YOU SURE THAT YOU ARE TOTALLY AL-RIGHT?
YEAH.

SERIOUSLY?
YES.
PLOP!
TAKERU?!
WHAT'S WRONG?!

NOTHING. WHAT ABOUT YOUR KENDO PRACTICE? YOU REALLY SHOULD NOT MISS IT.
IT'S OVER ALREADY. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT TIME IT IS?!

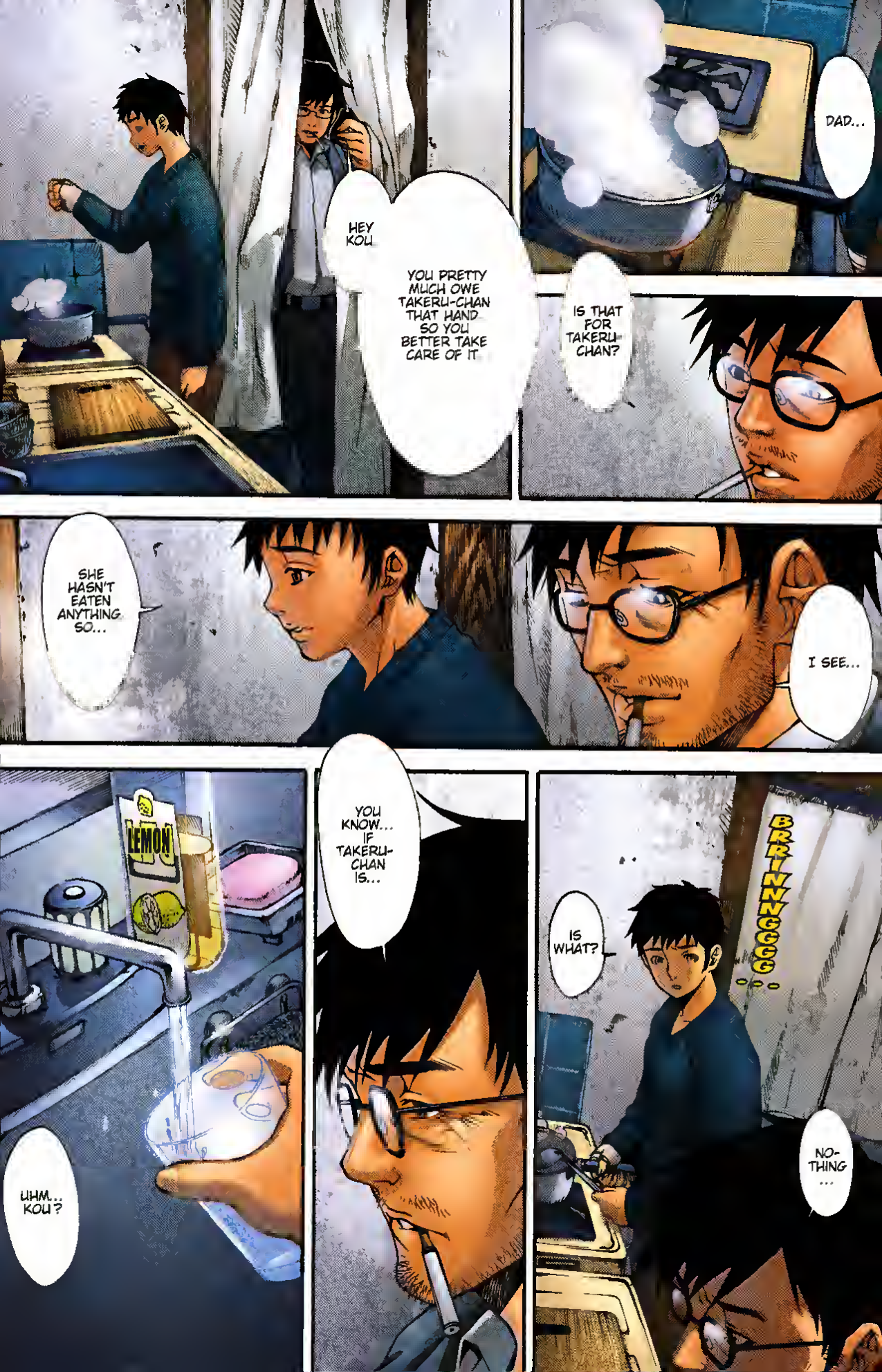

SOLO... SOLO PRACTICE!
I WAS TALKING ABOUT PRACTICING BY YOURSELF!
BELIEVE ME, I'VE SEEN YOUR KENDO SKILLS. YOU SHOULD BE PRACTICING ALL THE TIME!


NITCH
GEE. THANKS FOR THE ENDORSE-MENT...

SKREEEEEEEE...
KOU? I'M SO SORRY...
IT'S JUST...
TAKERU ...
S...TOP.
NO, WAIT! WHY DID I...
I'M SORRY... THAT WASN'T ME!

OHH ...
BRRR!
WHAT'S GOING ON...
WHAT IN THE WORLD IS HAPPENING TO ME?!

WHY COULDN'T I HELP HER... OR AT LEAST STOP HER.
I'M SO PATHETIC!
YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY.
WE'LL GET YOU FIXED UP GOOD AS NEW, NO MATTER WHAT I HAVE TO DO!
SMASH!
SMASH!


HEY KOU
YOU PRETTY MUCH OWE TAKERU-CHAN THAT HAND SO YOU BETTER TAKE CARE OF IT
DAD...
IS THAT FOR TAKERU-CHAN?
SHE HASN'T EATEN ANYTHING SO...
I SEE...
LEMON
UHM... KOU?
YOU KNOW... IF TAKERU-CHAN IS...
BRRINNNGGGG
IS WHAT?
NO-THING ...

HELLO?
OH--
MR. MAYOR, HOW CAN I HELP YOU? HAS YOUR WIFE HAD ANOTHER EPISODE?
WHAT?
WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?
IT SEEMS THAT THREE YOUNG MEN HAVEN'T COME BACK FROM PUTTING UP THE VILLAGE REVITALIZATION PROJECT BILLBOARD.
THERE WERE SIGNS OF A VIOLENT STRUGGLE AT THE BILLBOARD SITE. THEY FOUND BLOOD.
BLOOD?
AND WITH THE BURNING OF THE SHUMEIJI TEMPLE, BOTH THE MAYOR AND THE FAMILIES ARE WORRIED SICK.
WORRIED THAT...

...THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN DEVOURED BY DEMONS.
MOTHER? WHY IN THE WORLD DID YOU GIVE ME SUCH A MASCULINE NAME?
BECAUSE I HOPE THAT YOU MIGHT BE MISTAKEN FOR A BOY.
WHY?
IS IT BETTER TO BE A BOY?
BECAUSE GIRLS BECOME DEMONS.
I'M A DEMON?!

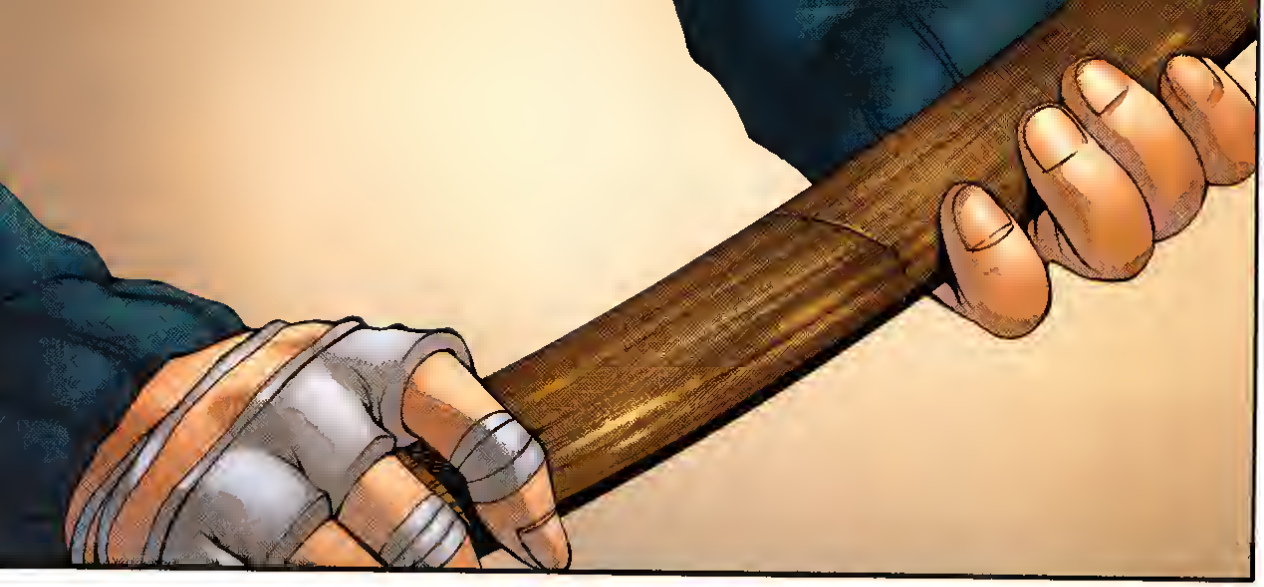
THE BLOOD OF DEMON HUNTERS RUNS THROUGH THE MINAMOTOS FAMILY.
IT HAS BEEN PASSED DOWN FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS...
EVEN TO THIS DAY,
THAT STILL HOLDS TRUE.
RREEK!
RREEK!
THIS IS ONI-KIRI-TOU... THE DEMON SLAYER THAT OUR ANCESTORS USED TO DESTROY THE DEMONS.
IF THE DEMONS HAVE TRULY RETURNED...
THEN A MEMBER OF THE MINAMOTO FAMILY MUST BE THE ONE WHO SLAYS THEM.
NO MATTER --

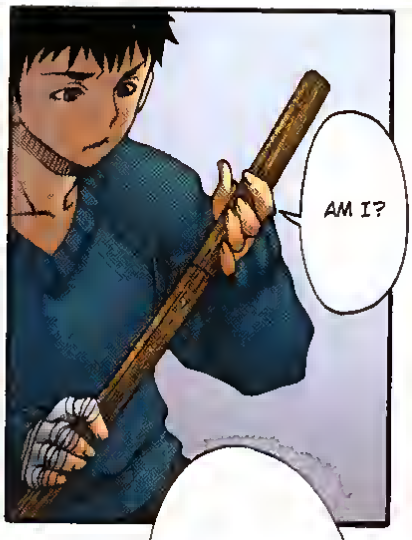
--WHAT FORM THE DEMON COMES IN...
YOU MUST SLAY THEM!

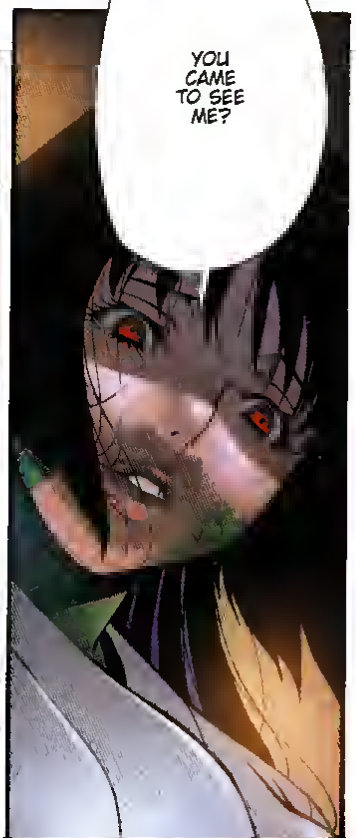
CHAPTER 3
SWORD OF STEEL

KOU? ARE YOU CRYING AGAIN?!
TAKERU ...
SNIFF
SNIFF
FATHER'S TRAINING... IT'S.. TOO HARD.
OF COURSE! IT HAS TO BE...

YOU'RE THE DESCENDANT OF DEMON HUNTERS!
...
THEN WHY AM I SO WEAK?!
WEAK, HUH?
DON'T SAY THAT!
YOU ARE STRONG, KOU!




AM I?


YOU CAME TO SEE ME?

KA-KRACK!
COME WITH ME!

TAKERU HAS DONNED THE DEMON'S HAND.
DAD...
I KNOW.
FATHER?
HAS SHE... BECOME A DEMON?
RIGHT NOW... WE DON'T KNOW.
DO WE HAVE TO KILL HER?
BUT, IF...
IF SHE HAS...
HARD TO EVEN IMAGINE...

WELL, DO WE?! HAVE TO KILL TAKERU...
WITH THE DEMON SLAYER?!
SHHKKTTTT!

I NEED TO KNOW. DO I HAVE TO...
...KILL HER?
SQUEEZE
OW?!
I JUST... SOME-THING IS...
WHAT'S WRONG?
I DON'T KNOW HOW, BUT...

I...
SENSE SOME-THING.
TO BE CONTINUED

HEADLINES HEADLINES HEADLINES HEADLINES

•First Born•
coming in July!

HEADLINES HEADLINES HEA

ON SALE IN MAY

•PLUS•

Top Cow's Best of:

Marc Silvestri

240 page trade paperback

The Head of the Herd himself is featured in this trade collection which brings together over 10 years of this industry superstar's best work for his own studio! This hefty trade provides diehard and new fans alike with a sampling of Marc's absolute best work from the Top Cow era. Featuring an extended art gallery, full issues and behind the scenes designs brought together for this edition!

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Phil Smith -managing editor
Joshua Cozine -assistant editor
Sheldon Mitchell -production
Adrien Nicita-webmaster

The most important story to ever hit the Top Cow Universe arrives in July!

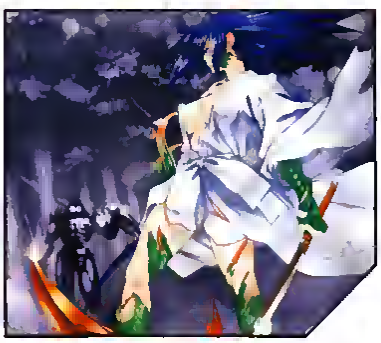
Witchblade writer **Ron Marz** (*Ion, Samurai Heaven & Earth*) pairs with Croatian painting sensation **Stjepan Sejic** (*The Darkness: Level 1, Witchblade*) as Sara Pezzini, on leave from the NYPD, awaits the arrival of her child. But unknown to her, epic events are unfolding. Agents of the Angelus are seeking a new host, but first they want mob boss Jackie Estacado out of the way... permanently. The cold war between Dark and Light is heating up and the stage for the next incredible year is set here! First Born #1 features covers by Marc Silvestri and a stunning triple-gatefold variant by Sejic.

•NEXT ISSUE•

WITCHBLADE TAKERU MANGA #4

Takeru and Kuo reconcile and begin researching the lore surrounding the "Demon Claw", the Witchblade. Their research is cut short when they encounter Kira, a powerful demon warrior!

Originally serialized in Japan's popular magazine *Champion Red*!



•FROM THE OFFICE•

Post Convention Jibber Jabber!

Top Cow has kick started its Convention season with a bang! For anyone who has not seen our new booth check it out above. So far we've hit New York, Los Angeles and Seattle and we are just getting started. San Diego plans are in motion and we are certainly looking forward to hitting downtown! Portfolio reviews, new books and artist signings will be taking place everyday, looking forward to seeing everyone there!

–Moo

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Phil Smith - managing editor

ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO:

WITCHBLADE MANGA
c/o Top Cow Productions, Inc.
10350 Santa Monica Blvd., #100
Los Angeles, CA 90025
eMail: fanmail@topcowent.com

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LETTERS - TROY PETERI
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COVER - KAZASA SUMITA

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY AKITA SHOTEN AS WITCHBLADE TAKERU.

DEDICATED TO CHRIS CARLISLE

WITCHBLADE™

TAKERU MANGA

I KNOW YOUR SWEET SCENT. I CAN TASTE IT.
SKRT
THERE'S NO POINT HIDING...

YOU ARE PRACTICALLY AN ANIMAL.
THE WITCHBLADE IS DEVOURING YOUR HUMANITY.
YOU ARE BEYOND REASON... GOVERNED ONLY BY INSTINCT.

BRING ME THE WITCHBLADE!
CAN I EAT HER?
EVERYTHING BUT THE RIGHT ARM...
SLLLLLINK!
SLLLLLINK!
COME AND GET IT...

IS IT THE DEMON SLAYER TELLING ME?
THERE IS SOME-THING THERE... PROBABLY THE SAME CREATURES THAT ATTACKED THE TEMPLE.
IF THAT IS TRUE, WHY AM I GOING THERE?
CAN I EVEN DO IT--
THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BUT YOU, KOU--

I'M SORRY, SON. IF I COULD DO IT... I WOULDN'T BE THE VILLAGE DOCTOR.
AS THE CENTURIES PASSED, DEMON HUNTERS BECAME SCATTERED.
AND JUST AS THE DEMONS VANISHED INTO LEGEND, THE DEMON HUNTERS FADED INTO NOTHING MORE THAN A CHILDREN'S TALE.
SORRY?
DAD...
YOU HAVE NO CHOICE, KOU. IT FALLS UPON YOU.
BUT YOU MUST BE CAREFUL. THE DEMONS...

...THEY DEVOUR HUMANS.
I TOLD YOU NOT TO PREY UPON THEM INDISCRIMINATELY.

GRRRR--OOOWWWWWLL!

SO, THEY ARE NO MATCH FOR HER...
SPLUNK
KA-RAKA
KA-KRACK
BUT THEY ARE NOT SUPERNATURAL BEINGS. THEY CAN BE HUNTED...

...LIKE THE BEARS AND WILD BOARS THAT LIVE IN THE MOUNTAINS
THEY CAN BE KILLED.
KA-BAKA
KA-KAK
KA-KAK
AND LIKE MAN HAS DONE TO SOME SPECIES... THEY CAN BE HUNTED TO EXTINCTION.
SMASH
...BY THE DESCENDANTS OF THE DEMON HUNTERS
THEY ONCE WERE...
WHO BURIED THEM IN THE DEMON MOUND ON THE EDGE OF TOWN.

THE WITCHBLADE RIGHTFULLY BELONGS TO US...
NO... THAT WASN'T NEARLY ENOUGH.
AND IT IS TOO DANGEROUS TO LEAVE IN THE HANDS OF A MERE HUMAN-- MUCH LESS AN INSECURE YOUNG GIRL WITH NO SENSE OF SELF.
COME ON... I WANT MORE!

YESSSSS....
YOU WILL GET YOUR WISH!
BUT IT IS MY THIRST THAT WILL BE QUENCHED...
MY THIRST FOR YOU!
PANT
PANT
PANT

SO EXHAUST-ED...
WAIT... THERE!
WHOOSH
WHOOSH

KLANG
ZWISH
ZWISH
THOK

WHAT?!
YOU BLOCKED IT?!
PANT
PANT
PANT

NO... I...
OH MY...
NOT AGAIN...

YOUNG LADY, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING?!
I'M DISAPPOINTED. YOU CAN'T BE SATISFIED YET.
WHAM

I SEE...
GLACKK...
DRIP
DRIP
YOU MANAGED TO REGAIN SOME SENSE OF YOURSELF.
SHUT... UP...
BAD TIMING.
SUCH A PITY. TOO LATE NOW!
GRRRPP...

MY HAND...
TAKERU...
PLEASE! YOU HAVE TO HELP KOU!
USE MY ORGANS, MY BLOOD...DO WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO!
KOU,
HOW DO YOU FEEL?

IT'S JUST SO STRANGE, YOU KNOW?
MY SKIN GRAFT WAS ONLY SUPPOSED TO BE A STOPGAP MEASURE, BUT SOMEHOW IT'S GROWN RIGHT ON YOU...
GROSS.
NO, IT'S NOT!
FACE FACTS. THIS HAS TO BE BUDDHA'S BLESSING.
KOU!
EARTH TO KOU!
ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME?!
MAN, THAT LOOK ON HER FACE...
IT WAS AS THOUGH SHE HAD COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN THE GREAT THING SHE HAD DONE FOR ME.

PANT
THE ONE...
PANT
THE ONE WHO HELPED ME...
PANT
IT WASN'T THE BUDDHA.
PANT
KAH-RUNNNNCH!
KAH-KRACK!
AAAAAHHH!
I'LL BE TAKING THE WITCH BLADE...
JINGG...
OH!

N...
NOOO...
I DON'T...
WANT...
...TO
BECOME
A
DEMON!
KI-YAAAAAAAA!
UHNNG...

SPLUNK
WAIT... COULD THAT...
HISSSSSSSSS
POSSIBLY BE...
OH, KOU...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
K..KOU?
THE DEMON SLAYER?!
TO BE CONTINUED

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